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THE

IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY

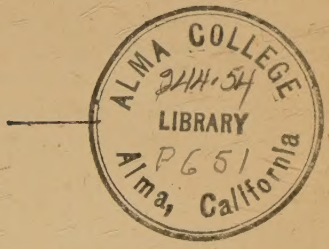
FROM

THE ORIGINAL ITALIAN *CONSIDERATIONS*

OF

FATHER JOHN PETER PINAMONTI

OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS



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THE following pages reproduce, faithfully and without material change, the classical *Considerations* of Father Pinamonti on those interior perfections of the Blessed Virgin Mary which make her worthy of the esteem and love of Christians. The original Italian work was published two centuries ago, and has remained a favorite book of devotion with all those whose religion consists in what St. Paul styles—*reasonable service*. This has led to its choice as the third complete treatise issued in the SACRED HEART LIBRARY—a quarterly publication designed to popularize standard theological works of Catholic devotion.

In this series the present work holds its proper place. The first issue was the great work of Father Henry Ramière—*The Apostleship of Prayer*—a thorough and practical exposition of the doctrine of the prayer of Christians in union with the Heart of Christ. This comprehended the entire theological groundwork of Christian devotion. The second treatise published, completing the four numbers of the first year, was the like noteworthy work of Father

Galliffet—*The Adorable Heart of Jesus.* This book has the greater authority as it is the work of the official theologian chosen to defend in Rome the cause of the Sacred Heart, when there was question of establishing Its special feast and so approving the devotion throughout the Church. In the latter volume are also found the chief doctrinal points concerning the Heart of Mary. These were not within the scope of the present work, which comes in its turn to present the motives of high esteem and tender affection due to this Immaculate Heart. Taking up one by one the dispositions wrought by the grace of God in the soul of the Mother of the Divine Son, it thus covers the ground of solid Christian teaching which underlies all true devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The author accurately divided his book into seven "Considerations," one for each day of the week; and to these were added suitable prayers and other exercises of devotion, with copious examples from the lives of the Saints. In this edition, the latter have been omitted altogether, as being beyond the scope here intended; an equivalent, better adapted to present use, may easily be had in approved manuals of devotion. The former have been simply turned into as many chapters.

The wide reading of Father Pinamonti in the spiritual writers of every age of the Church enabled him to quote freely from their pages, to which for the most part he was careful to refer. It was thought

that the multitude of these references would hinder rather than help the special utility aimed at in the present edition, which has no controversial end in view. Moreover, the historical defence of Catholic devotion to the Blessed Virgin long since received its final treatment, and is clearly stated in the common works of controversy. A purpose of edification may undoubtedly be served by setting forth in a single list the names of Fathers and Doctors and great masters of the spiritual life who, in the different centuries of the Church's history, have instructed the Christian people in so fundamental a devotion. Such a list has accordingly been added, at the end of the volume, to the summary of Scripture texts here applied to the Blessed Virgin Mary. This may help to strengthen in the heart of the thoughtful reader that sense of solidarity with Christ's disciples of every time, and with the dutiful Heart of the Divine Son Himself, in the esteem and love of the ever Blessed Mother of God. It was thus the Holy Ghost inspired her to prophesy of herself (St. Luke, i. 48): *For behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.*

A knowledge of the author's life, which was remarkable in many ways, will help to the appreciation of his book.

Father Pinamonti was of an honorable family of Pistoia, a city of Tuscany in Italy. He was born in the year 1632, on the feast of St. John the beloved

Disciple of our Lord ; and this name was given him in baptism. In his fifteenth year he entered the Society of Jesus in the Novitiate of Rome. He had the misfortune, from a merely human point of view, to contract a chronic headache while still in his first religious life. This clung to him without remission until his death, more than fifty years later. For purposes of study he was obliged to rely largely on the assistance of others, who read aloud to him the different authors treating of the matter in hand. He afterward by himself ruminated what he had heard until it was perfectly clear in his mind. A wonderfully retentive memory and keen understanding, together with undaunted patience and fervor of spirit, made this method of study highly successful ; and it was courageously persevered in throughout life. Father Pinamonti thus came to be deservedly considered one of the most learned men of his time in that practical theology to which his piety and the circumstances of his priestly career led him to apply himself.

In the year 1665, he was given as companion to Father Paul Segneri for the work of the popular missions. The latter was already known in the chief cities of Italy for those Lenten sermons which have placed him among the greatest preachers of modern times. But God had inspired him with the design of devoting the power of his eloquence to the salvation of the common people. Accordingly, he now began with Father Pinamonti that stupendous

series of missions, preached to the people of Northern and Central Italy, which has perhaps not been paralleled since St. Vincent Ferrer and St. Bernardine of Sienna were preaching to the populations of the Middle Ages the terrors of the universal judgment and the power of the name of Jesus. These missions lasted for many days together, and were regularly given in some central town where the inhabitants of the whole surrounding country were assembled. They followed each other continuously during the entire fair season, for many of the exercises had to be performed out-of-doors, as no church was large enough for the concourse of people. Father Segneri was the preacher and leader in the exercises of public penance. To Father Pinamonti fell the humbler, but not less important, task of instructing and hearing confessions. For twenty-six years these two veritable apostles went their way together, with a mutual love and confidence that never wavered. Father Segneri was finally withdrawn from the work by the command of the Pope, who desired that he should resume his great Lenten discourses for the benefit of more cultured audiences. Father Pinamonti was thus left in sole charge of the work, which he continued with unabated success twelve years longer. Broken with age, he died as he had ardently desired in the midst of his beloved missions. From his last explanation of the catechism he was borne by his companions to his bed; and his dying words were the sacramental absolution pronounced over

one of them who had wished to confess to him for the last time. It was the 25th of June, 1703. Of his seventy years of life, he had passed nearly fifty-six in religion and thirty-eight in the laborious career of a popular missionary.

There is no doubt that this lifelong experience in instructing and guiding the minds of others trained Father Pinamonti to that crystal clearness of thought and expression which are found in all his books. Of these he left eighteen, some intended for the use of directors of souls, but most of them like the present work for the better understanding of the essentials of Christian piety.

Father Segneri's testimony to his companion's special ability is worth quoting. When called for a series of missions in the Genoese territory, he wrote to the Father General of the Society: "Without Father Pinamonti I nowise dare to take the missions of Genoa; for I know that he does more with his explanations of the catechism than I with my preaching." After the missions were over, the Supreme Senate of Genoa bore its own witness in a letter of thanks to the Father General. "In so holy a work Father Pinamonti has helped greatly. He has been unwearied in labor and of good example to all, and he has a particular way of instructing the people and enkindling in them devotion and love toward God."

Six of the classical works published under the name of Father Segneri were largely due to the labors of Father Pinamonti. The former frankly acknowl-

edges this in proposing the plan of *The Christian Instructed:* "Father Pinamonti is wonderful for knowing how to touch the main point of things. The three little books—*The Confessor*, *The Penitent*, and *The Devout Servant of the Virgin Mary*—owe much to him, as we composed them together. Yet he absolutely wishes that all three should go under my name, as he judges from various external considerations that this is for the greater service of God."

The first part of the author's introduction to the present work drew a vivid contrast between the early Christians of the age of Martyrs and the Christians of his own times. This has been omitted; but the conclusion of this zealous missionary of the people is of lasting interest. It has been the result of the pious meditation of many other great and holy souls down to our own day, when troubled in spirit at the onward march of impurity in society. It may serve to stir Christian minds to a more earnest consideration of the truths here set forth, concerning the *Mother of fair love* (Ecclesiasticus, xxiv. 24).

"If there is any one thing that may clear us in face of those first centuries of Christianity, it seems to me to be the devotion to the Blessed Virgin. Not only this has not grown cold among Christians, but rather it burns more and more brightly, with a flame of devotion that did not universally appear in those early times. Perhaps this is the divine seed which our Lord's special Providence has left us, that we

may not become altogether reprobate. *Unless the Lord had left us seed, we should have been even as Sodom and like unto Gomorrha* (Isaias, i. 9).

"In the case of sickness, when some working of nature gives sign of the recovery of health, all the care of the physician is turned to help on its successful operation. So it belongs to us to promote this loving devotion to the Virgin Mother, from which we may hope the moral reformation of the future, and, in the present, a safe barrier to keep the evils round about us from any further advance."

The great Pontiff of our own day saw a like "Sign of the Times" in this devotion of purity and divine love. Pius IX., when defining the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, uttered these remarkable words: "With sure hope and with all confidence we wait for this Most Blessed Virgin to bring it to pass that our Holy Mother the Church may flourish throughout all nations, that all hindrances may be taken from her path and every error be overthrown; and that all the erring may return to the way of truth, and there may be One Fold and One Shepherd."

The editor may be allowed to add, in his own name, the modest concluding words of the venerated author. "In any case, should this little book be of use to no one else, I hope it will be of some use to its writer. Thus if other merits for salvation be wanting, this—however slight—may take their place;

namely, that I have spoken the praises of the Blessed Virgin. This will fulfil the ancient promise—*Those who make me known, shall have eternal life* (Ecclesiasticus, xxiv. 31).

R. S. DEWEY, S. J.

Ladyday, 25 *March*, 1890.

INTRODUCTION.

DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY.

THIS little book has been put together to enkindle in those who are willing to read it devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

This devotion is of two kinds. One is substantial and solid, and consists in a high esteem of the virtues and merits of this great Queen. The other, which is not so essential, is sensible and consists in a certain tender affection toward her. We shall strive to acquire both: the first, by considering those things which make our Blessed Lady so worthy of all our esteem; the second, by setting before ourselves a sensible object of devotion, namely, the Immaculate Heart of the same Blessed Virgin.

What do we understand here by "Heart?"

In Sacred Scripture the heart is often taken for the will, and at times for all the inner faculties of the soul. This is the moral sense of the word; and we shall often use it to signify the will and interior dispositions of the Blessed Virgin.

But in the practice of the most spiritual devotion, in order to be stirred to greater fervor, we need something material and sensible. Thus we shall also use the word "heart" in its physical sense; namely,

for that which, in the Blessed Virgin as in ourselves, was the first to be formed of her pure body, the first to become alive, and the last to die. This Heart is worthy of our love and reverence; for it is all full of the heavenly warmth of charity, toward God and toward us, God's poor creatures.

Our chief aim, therefore, shall be to acquire this high esteem of the Blessed Virgin Mary; and the sensible object of our devotion shall be her Immaculate Heart. This is to be honored by us as the most precious part of that virginal body, which was found worthy to clothe with human flesh and blood the Eternal Word of God.

. . . . . .

This little work is not likely to pass into the hands of those who are not already devout to the Blessed Virgin. It hardly seems reasonable to fear that these will find the praises here given her at all exaggerated. Their esteem of the privileges and holiness of the Virgin Mother is so high that we shall with difficulty reach to that ideal which they have already set up in their hearts.

In spite of this, it seems best to give a word of warning here at the beginning. We shall thus meet fairly all suspicion, however unreasonable our fear of it may be.

In the first place, it might possibly be thought that the praises of the Blessed Virgin, set forth in our considerations, impair in some way the praise due to Jesus Christ.

Now, in point of fact, the glory given to the Mother of God is so far from being opposed to the glory due to her Divine Son, that the Saints consider it one and the same thing. St. Jerome expressly declares this: "All the honor done to the Mother redounds to the glory of her Son;" and St. Bernard: "Whatever praise we give the Mother belongs to her Son;" while St. Andrew of Crete adds: "I would not say that there is a glory common to the Son with His Mother, but rather that they have one and the same glory."[1] This might also be shown from other Saints.

So, too, that woman of the Gospel, who was moved by the Holy Ghost to give praise aloud to Jesus Christ, knew no better way than to praise loudly the Mother who had borne Him and nourished Him at the breast: *Blessed is the womb that bore Thee, and the breasts that gave Thee suck.*[2]

The greatest glory of the sun is his possession of so exhaustless a store of light that, without any loss to his own brilliancy, he can impart such splendor to the moon as almost to make her another and lesser sun. In like manner, the greatest glory of Christ is His being the Fountainhead of so much grace that He can impart it, in a measure surpassing all our thought, to His Mother, and thus make her His companion and a living copy of His own divine virtues, in so far as a creature is capable of this.

[1] See *List of References* at end of volume.

[2] St. Luke, xi. 27.

This also clearly shows that we ought not to fear what may be brought up against us in the second place; namely, that we may easily go beyond all bounds in our praises of the Blessed Virgin.

Give an architect the measure of a pedestal, and he will at once tell how high a column may be set up on it in accordance with the due proportions of art. In the same way, when we come to know the basis on which the privileges of the Virgin Mary rest, we shall at once see that they reach up to a height beyond the ken of a created mind. For the foundation of this temple of God's own making is her ineffable dignity as Mother of the Word Incarnate.

This dignity, as we shall later see more explicitly, is the highest station to which a created person can be raised. We cannot expect to find on earth any measure that answers to it. Yet to say something of it, however confusedly, we may at least attend to the following points.

The almighty power of God the Father, when He formed our Blessed Lady, bestowed on her such riches of grace as were proportioned to the Infinite Gift He was making her of God the Word, Whom He imparted to her as her Divine Son.

Thus too the wisdom of the Eternal Word imparted to her whatever gifts were needed to make up the mutual fitness due between the Mother and her Divine Son. St. Bernardine of Sienna says this was "by an infinity, as it were, of graces and perfections." Another writer explains that, when the

Virgin gave to Christ His human being, so in a certain way we may say Christ imparted to His Mother a Divine being. "Thou hast given Me to be a man, and I will give thee to be divine."[3]

Last of all, the goodness of the Holy Ghost imparted such rich gifts to Mary as it was meet the Infinite Ocean of grace should pour forth into a heart wherein It found no hindrance—neither fault nor imperfection, neither ingratitude nor lukewarmness —to obstruct the glow of Its divine favors.

We may therefore bring within the scant bound of words that which has no bounds, by saying—As much was given to the Blessed Virgin Mary as could be given to a pure creature. That is, not absolutely speaking, for everyone knows that God's Omnipotence is without limit; but "as much as could be given" in that order of things in which the Lord has decreed to impart His Divine Perfections to beings outside of Himself. And this was to the end that our so Blessed Lady, after the most Sacred Humanity of Jesus Christ, should be the greatest work of His almighty hand. *For He Who is mighty hath done great things to me.*[4]

What then are we to have in mind when we speak of the Virgin Mary?

Lift up your thoughts, reach far out with your affections. Conceive all that can be found highest and sublimest among created things; and even then

[3] Guerricus.

[4] *Canticle of the Blessed Virgin*, St. Luke, i. 49.

be sure that you will never come up to the exact truth, nor can you ever go beyond it. A Saint assures us of this: "He who with serious praise shall say all that is great and glorious of thee, O most Holy Virgin, will never wander from the bounds of truth; and yet no speech will ever equal the greatness of thy dignity." [5]

Yes, the Blessed Virgin is a pure creature; but she is a creature that stands by herself in a sublime rank of her own. In this she is inferior only to her Son. Thus she holds a station to which no other creature can aspire; and this station, which is superior beyond comparison to that of any other creature, contains all that is good and all that is beautiful among created perfections.

St. Bernardine says: "It is to be held as certain that the Blessed Virgin is above all the orders of Angels, inasmuch as she holds a singular station, filling it by herself alone wholly and entirely." To this view Gerson gives his support: "According to the law of the Heavenly Hierarchies laid down by Dionysius the Areopagite, the Virgin Mary has every perfection of creatures, since all others are inferior to her; and thus she is rightly styled—*Queen of the Universe.*"

This is not without consequence; for the various degrees which measure the ascent to the highest heaven reach immeasurably further than the degrees by which we reckon the utmost limit of our globe.

[5] St. Basil of Seleucia.

In like manner, the virtues and gifts and privileges of the Mother of God are beyond measure greater than the virtues and gifts and privileges of all the other Saints taken together.

Again, at the Incarnation of the Eternal Word our Lady was found in a state of grace so high that she could already be the worthy Mother of God. Now during the many years she still lived after the Incarnation, she kept on increasing this same grace without any cessation, so that it was multiplied in her many times over. It is right therefore to say that, at the last, she was found in a state which in a certain way was more than simply being the Mother of God.

But these things can be understood aright only by God Himself; and we, for our part, must acknowledge that God alone can fully know the perfections of the most Blessed Virgin. Thus, a spiritual writer says: "He alone knows the excellence of Mary, Who gave her that excellence. It can be discerned only by the Creator, and is known to no creature."[6]

There is no reason then for fearing that the things which we have to say of the Blessed Virgin will appear excessive and exaggerated. We might rather mistrust that this devotion to her Holy and Immaculate Heart may seem less solid and, I would almost say, womanish.

But, if this were so, we should have to account

[6] Richard of St. Laurence.

for little the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself in His private revelations to the Saints. Thus He instructed St. Bridget to give reverence and honor to the Heart of His Blessed Mother as being filled with greater charity than can be found in all the creatures of heaven and earth together. We should also have to say that the same Blessed Lord had abased too far His Divine Majesty in the visions He has shown to His espoused souls. Thus, on the feast of the Assumption, He made St. Gertrude see that act of impetuous love with which He came down into the Heart of His Most Holy Mother, and by which it remained full of infinite merits.

Accordingly, instead of making little account of this means of devotion, it will be more reasonable to put it in practice, and thus enkindle within ourselves the love of the Blessed Virgin. Thus too we may be made worthy of the lot of another Servant of God who, with utmost joy of soul, saw her own name written in the Heart of Mary.[7]

Our Lord gave St. Gertrude to understand that He had kept for these last times the devotion to His Divine Heart, in order to stir the lukewarmness of Christians to renewed fervor. And He has joined inseparably together the increase of praise to Himself with the honor to His Blessed Mother. Who knows if He has not also saved up the devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary for our day, to warm our cold hearts and give us numberless graces through

[7] Venerable Frances Vacchinia.

its means? For, as in Mary He has stored up all His treasures, so He has made her prayers the rule of His mercies. *The law of clemency is on her tongue.*[8]

Last of all, the reader must be warned that a hasty glance is not enough for duly profiting by this devotion. But he should read and re-read and seriously ponder the great gifts of the Blessed Virgin which are here set down; and he should earnestly labor to give her the honor and service here taught. In this way, the mind will conceive that high esteem and the heart acquire that tender affection, which are necessary for us if our prayers are to be heard and we are to merit the sublime title of Devout Servants of Mary and of her Immaculate Heart. . . .

How can you expect the truth to be impressed on your heart, if you read on with flying haste, casting the eye over the pages as you would with a novel? Keep well in mind that service done to the Blessed Virgin Mary has always been recognized by the Saints as the sign of a predestined soul. *He that shall find me, shall find life.*[9] Consider also whether carelessness in honoring the Mother of God is ever found, except where faith is languishing. . . .

The Mother of God, it is well known, imitates God's own bounty in her gifts, seeking out claims on her liberality. Thus we may all say to this Blessed Lady, with St. Hildebert: "Thou teachest me to hope beyond my merits, for thou ceasest not bestowing gifts which are greater than all my merits."

[8] Proverbs, xxxi. 26. [9] Proverbs, viii. 35.

CHAPTER I.

THE UNSPOTTED MIRROR.

[*Naught defiled shall come upon her. . . . . For she is the unspotted mirror of God's majesty.*—Wisdom, vii. 26.]

I.

The high purity due to the Virgin Mary as Daughter of the Eternal Father.

Two kinds of purity may be distinguished for our present purpose. The one is positive, and consists in charity toward God and the other virtues. The other is negative, and consists in being free from all stain of sin.

Now in the Mother of God the first kind of purity was not the highest possible, because the created sanctity which was in her could always keep on increasing. But the purity which is the negation of sin truly reached its utmost height in her, because she was the farthest possible removed from every sin. St. Thomas thus lays down this truth: "A being may be created than which nothing purer can possibly exist among created things; namely, if it is sullied by no stain of sin."

It is for this reason the Blessed Virgin is called —*Beautiful as the moon, chosen as the sun.*[1]

This points out to us that, in positive sanctity, she differs from her Divine Child as the moon does from the sun. The beauty of her holiness is indeed beyond all power of speech; yet it is also beyond measure less than that of Jesus Christ, Who is the very Sun of Justice. Moreover, it was not a beauty of her nature, but a radiance from without, which shone down upon her from that Divine Sun: *Because He hath looked on the lowliness of His handmaid.*[2]

On the contrary, in negative sanctity or purity, the Blessed Virgin is beautiful, and *chosen as the sun.* Inasmuch as she was preserved from every sin, she was the exact likeness of her Divine Child in innocence. She had, even as He had, an entire freedom from every stain, though in a different way and for a different reason. This verifies the prophecy of Isaias that, in the Church's firmament, *the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun.*[3]

Sin had no part in Jesus Christ; and in like manner, in imitation of Him, sin had no part in His Mother. This is true alike of original and of actual sin, and of all their evil effects and occasions.

She was preserved from the obligation of contracting the sin of our origin. For she was not included in that primal stipulation which was made with our first father Adam [in regard to himself and

[1] Canticles, vi. 9. [2] St. Luke, i. 48.
[3] Isaias, xxx. 26.

his descendants; since she had already been chosen out, in the designs of God, to be the Mother of His Son, and this was incompatible with any stain of sin].

She was free from the possibility of sinning. For the impeccability which Christ had by nature, the Blessed Virgin had by grace [as being His Mother]. The stimulus of sin was not in her, nor did she ever feel the slightest inclination toward evil. No image or form or thought of anything impure ever entered her mind. She was without any disordered passions. For where there is no root of sin, there cannot be the branches.

She was incapable of receiving the suggestions of evil from within her soul. For the dominion she had over the powers of her soul was liable to no rebellion. And if, at any time, the demon ventured to tempt her from without, he deservedly gained by it only to be the more strongly trampled under her feet. *She shall crush thy head* [as was prophesied to him when the Redeemer was first promised, after the temptation and fall of Adam].[4]

She was purer than the very Angels. For these, though they have never sinned, were once able to sin; and if they are pure, their innocence comes from their nature as a necessary consequence, and not from grace through merit as in the Virgin Mary.[5]

Last of all, she is not only most pure in herself,

[4] Genesis, iii. 15. [5] Albertus Magnus.

but she is also pure in others. The only sight of her brings purity to those who look upon her; pure like the snow, she chills by her presence all heat of lawless passion.

How could this be otherwise if Mary was to be the worthy Daughter of the Eternal Father. Thus David the King calls aloud to her: *Hear, Daughter, and see, and forget thy people; and the King shall desire thy beauty.*[6]

It is true this daughterhood does not go beyond the limits of adoption, which is wrought in us also by grace. But the grace of the Blessed Virgin was far above that of all the Saints; and she was like to none so much as to her Divine Son. Hence it follows that her adoption was higher and closer than that of all the Saints, and like to the natural Sonship of Christ.

Thus the Blessed Virgin is the Daughter of the Eternal Father by a stronger reason than that which makes all the elect His children. The same reason makes it fitting that she should be more like to the Eternal Father than are all the other just souls; and, consequently, that she should be farther removed than all from every stain of sin. The Motherhood of Mary on earth was to be most like the Fatherhood of God in heaven. Certainly, therefore, it must be fitting she should be so pure that none other may be purer save God alone. This is said by St. Anselm: "It was fitting that the Blessed Virgin should shine

[6] Psalm xliv. 11, 12.

with such purity that, under God, none greater can be conceived. For God the Father was making her ready that He might give her His Only-Begotten Son."

A mirror, however slightly tarnished, cannot give back a faithful reflection. So, unless the Blessed Virgin had the privilege of being the first-born Daughter of the Eternal Father in the order of grace, we could never claim for her the privilege of being the faithful likeness of God the Father in her freedom from every stain of sin. For, on the one hand, this likeness is the prime reason of such adoption to being the child of God; and, on the other, there is no greater unlikeness to God than sin.

II.

As Mother of the Divine Son.

THIS high purity was also due to Mary as the Mother of the Divine Son. To be Mother of the Holy of holies and not herself to be altogether holy, is a monstrous assertion, says St. Anselm. We may persuade ourselves of this by a simple reasoning.

Jesus Christ would either have regard for His own honor, or for that of His Mother. For each of these reasons it was right that He should bestow on the Blessed Virgin an unequalled purity.

If He had regard to His Mother, He owed her —because she was His Mother—three things: honor, obedience, and love.

But what love would that have been for her if, being able, He had not made her free from every sin? For she abhorred every sin more than she dreaded any suffering; and she would have chosen not to be rather than be a sinner.

How could this subsist with the fact that Jesus Christ looks upon His Mother more lovingly than on all the heavenly court beside? Thus St. Bernardine says: "Christ's look of filial love upon His Mother must be so surpassing that not all the court of heaven together can be viewed by Him with such a degree of love." Yet, in the supposition of which we speak, He would not have granted His Mother that privilege which He has bestowed on His servants the Angels! For, when forming them, He brought together in one both nature and grace, as St. Augustine points out: "At one and the same time, God was creating their nature and pouring forth in them His grace."

Again, Eve, who was the first woman and the first to sin, would have this privilege of coming forth from the hands of her Creator entirely pure; and Mary would not have had it! Yet Mary is that Blessed Lady chosen out to repair the disobedience and harm wrought by that first woman. Even the Roman law declared: "The servant and the queen

ought not to have the same rule, nor be treated in the same way."

In like manner, where would be the honor due from Christ to His Mother, if He had allowed her to be sullied with the least sin, even in her primal origin? In such a state the Blessed Virgin would have been worthy of disesteem and even have been under His malediction, as one stained with original sin. Yet, on the other hand, how could that blessed creature of God's hand, who was one day to be His Mother, fall under His malediction? It was a part of God's own law: *Whosoever shall curse father or mother, shall die the death.*[7]

Last of all, Christ—the Son of God—owed obedience to His Mother. How could it come to pass that His Mother should once have been the slave of the evil one?

King Abimelech held Sara, the wife of Abraham, in his power; and when at last he restored her to liberty, he said these parting words: *Remember, thou wast once in my hands!*[8] How much greater reason would Satan have for boasting, if he had once held Mary in his slavery? Sara came from the king's hands without insult or injury; but the Blessed Virgin would have once been sullied! And even when freed from his hands, Satan could have said to her: "I let thee go, but remember—I have held thee captive in my toils; thou shalt one day crush my head, but bear in mind that the whole beginning

[7] Leviticus, xx. 9. [8] Genesis, xx. 16.

of thy life was mine; God may have what follows, but mine were the first-fruits: *Remember, thou wast once in my hands!*"

Could it ever have been right that the Incarnate Word of God should be so long subjected to a Mother of this kind? Even human laws did not suffer a mother ever to become the slave of her son. Yet the Son of God—the Wisdom of the Father—would allow His Mother to become the slave of Satan, though He could so easily preserve her from such servitude! If He had not thus preserved her, no other reason could be given for it than that He would not. What excuse could be found for His unwillingness to bestow this great blessing on her? As God, He could do all things; and as Man, He owed all things to His Mother who was the created cause of all His good.

It is not enough to say that, later on, He would sanctify her. Pardon, indeed, may heal the wound of infamy; but it takes not away the scar. This the ancient law acknowledged: "The remission of a penalty stamps with its mark those whom it sets free."

But, after all, even were it possible to believe that Christ had been regardless of the honor due to His Mother, how could He pass over the honor due to Himself? We may use here words attributed to St. Augustine, on a like subject: "Even if it were not the right of Mary, it was the right of the Son she bore."

No privilege can be in excess of the dignity of Mother of God. But if such there were, it could never be in excess of the dignity of that Divine Son Who was *made Flesh*[9] in her virginal womb. Everyone feels that the parents' dishonor turns to the dishonor of the children: *The shame of the son is a father without honor.*[10] Waters flowing through an unclean land become foul in their turn. So too the birth of the child carries with it the qualities of the mother.

So many contradictions and impossibilities are unbelievable. Never—not for one moment even—could sin have found a dwelling-place in the Heart of Mary. No actual sin, not original sin itself, could have been there to interfere with her immaculate purity—the holiest and most surpassing and wondrous gift of that Divine Lord Who was forming her to be a worthy Mother to Himself.

This is indeed the place for applying St. Augustine's rule: "Are we to reach that height of foolishness where, being only men, we see what ought to have been done, and yet believe that God would not do it?"

III.

As Spouse of the Holy Ghost.

THE third reason why the highest purity was due

[9] St. John, i. 14. [10] Ecclesiasticus, iii. 13.

to the Virgin Mary, is that she was the Spouse of the Holy Ghost.

All souls in the state of grace have for their privilege these heavenly espousals: *In faith will I espouse thee unto Me.*[11] But the bond between the Holy Ghost and the Blessed Virgin is of an order immeasurably higher. For these Espousals bind by a title of their own; namely, the consent which was asked of the Virgin Mary by the Archangel Gabriel, and which she gave through him to the Holy Ghost. In virtue of this consent the Spirit of God came upon her in soul and body, to make her a fruitful Mother and to form from her virginal blood the Flesh of the Incarnate Word.

[*The Angel Gabriel was sent from God into a city of Galilee, called Nazareth, to a Virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David: and the Virgin's name was* MARY. *And the Angel, entering in to her, said:* HAIL, FULL OF GRACE, THE LORD IS WITH THEE; BLESSED ART THOU AMONG WOMEN.

And she, hearing this, was troubled at his saying, and thought with herself what manner of salutation this should be.

And the Angel said to her: Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God. Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name JESUS. *He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High; and the*

[11] Osee, ii. 20.

Lord God shall give Him the throne of David His father; and He shall reign in the house of Jacob for ever, and OF HIS KINGDOM THERE SHALL BE NO END.

And Mary said to the Angel: How shall this be done? because I know not man.

And the Angel answering said to her: THE HOLY GHOST SHALL COME UPON THEE, *and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore, also,* THE HOLY THING WHICH SHALL BE BORN OF THEE SHALL BE CALLED THE SON OF GOD.

. . . . . .

And Mary said: BEHOLD THE HANDMAID OF THE LORD, BE IT DONE TO ME ACCORDING TO THY WORD.][12]

Of this consent, asked by the Holy Ghost and given by the Virgin Mary, St. Anselm says: "The very Spirit of God—the very Love of the Almighty Father and the Son—came corporally upon her, and made this Queen of heaven and earth its Spouse."

This, too, is the reason, says the commentator,[13] why the Archangel did not appear to her in sleep as he did to St. Joseph, but while she was awake. For sleep would not have been a fitting time to ask and give this consent to the Divine Espousals.

Knowing all this, who can believe that the Holy Ghost would not choose a Spouse high in every excellence? But she would not have been high in every excellence, if she had once been a sinner and

[12] St. Luke, i. 26–38. [13] Maldonatus.

only afterward been made holy. Her excellence would then have come to her by a late favor, and not from her very birth-spring. But the good beginning is here far too important for this; it is far too difficult a matter to cleanse from stains once contracted to the prejudice of honor. This was the old law: "The note of ill-fame, once imposed, remains forever."

No man, who could choose a spouse to his liking, would choose out one that was sullied by any stain. And how should the Spirit of God have chosen such a one, when He had the power to make her entirely after His own will? Even if the highest purity were due to the Virgin Mary for no other reasons, it was due because of this great dignity of being the Spouse of the Most High. This is according to the principle laid down by all human legislation: "The Queen is not indeed free from the laws; but the King grants to her the same privileges which he has himself."

It is not enough to answer that, in her conception and first years of life, these Divine Espousals had not yet taken place—that they were contracted only at the Incarnation of the Eternal Word. This proves nothing, so long as she was predestined from the beginning to these heavenly nuptials. For thus from the beginning there was due to her, as her previous dowry, every manner of grace, and therefore the original grace as well [the Immaculate Concep-

tion, that is, the being conceived without original sin].

Thus St. Epiphanius says: "The Spouse of Heaven received the Holy Ghost by right of dowry." Otherwise, she would never have been fitted to co-operate with the Holy Ghost in the Conception of the Incarnate Word. It was by this immaculate purity alone that she had the necessary likeness to the Sacred Humanity of the Redeemer.

What is far more, along with this sublime rank of Spouse, went the office of Intercessor between God and sinners. How could she worthily bear this charge, if she had herself been under sin at any time? "No one," says the law, "can exercise the duties of an office in which he has once failed." It is not just that anyone should be the agent of reconciliation, who has once shared in the offence which is the only cause of enmity. It is like the rod of Moses, which was wonderful in many ways; yet it was not chosen to bud forth with flowers and fruit in the hand of Aaron, because it had once been transformed into a serpent.

It remains, therefore, beyond all doubt that the Blessed Virgin Mary was always all beautiful and without stain—Immaculate! *Thou art all beautiful, and there is no spot in thee.*[14] "All beautiful," explains St. Bonaventure, "from the presence of all good; without spot, from the absence of all evil."

[14] Canticles, iv. 7.

The Eternal Father willed that she should be always holy, because she was His Daughter and His love came down upon her. The Divine Son willed that she should be always holy, because she was His Mother and His dutiful love went up to her. The Holy Spirit willed that she should be always holy, because she was the Spouse of the same Holy Ghost; and here love was to have its perfect work, which is the union of hearts.

"In this Spouse of God," says the Father St. Ildephonsus, "the Divine Spirit had, as it were, to enlarge Its working, and impart to her as much grace, as many privileges and gifts, as great a dignity as a pure creature is capable of—as much as it was fitting that most blessed soul should have which, after Christ, was to be the chief instrument of the same Holy Spirit in sanctifying the whole human race."

To this Blessed Virgin, therefore, in the words of the Prophet—*The glory of Libanus is given*—for she is worthy of it. *Shall the snow fail from Libanus?*—says a second Prophet.[15] So too from the Virgin Mary innocence has never failed; not by the least actual sin, nor less still by original sin that would suppose a far guiltier state. *Nothing defiled hath come upon her.* She is that *brightness which has come forth all pure* from the hands of her Creator; and such she has always remained. She is *the balm of sweetness unalloyed.* Her breast is forever *walled*

[15] Isaias, xxxv. 2; Jeremias, x. 14.

about with lilies; and no taint of impurity may draw nigh to her.[16]

In no other way could she have been found worthy in the sight of her Lord; for the Angels—*the stars of heaven—are not clean in His sight.*[17] And they have not sinned indeed, but they were once able to sin. How then could a heart, which might not only stain itself with sin but had been actually sullied, be found worthy of the Espousals of God Most High?

[16] Wisdom, vii. 25; Ecclesiasticus, xxiv. 21; Canticles, vii. 2.

[17] Job, xxv. 5.

CHAPTER II.

THE HEART WORTHY OF THE MOTHER OF GOD.

[*Whence is this to me, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?*—St. Luke, i. 44.]

I.

The high dignity of the Divine Maternity.

THE Lord wished to bestow on Solomon a heart suited to the dignity of a great king. Accordingly the Scripture informs us: *God gave Solomon a greatness of heart like to the sands which are by the shores of the sea.*[1] We may reason from this what must have been the greatness of the Heart of the Virgin Mary, since it was a heart worthy of the Mother of God.

Who can ever succeed in understanding it rightly? "If you seek to know what the Mother was like, you must first know what was the Son," says St. Eucherius. You aspire in thought to reach up to the high dignity of this great Mother. But first, if your courage so prompts you, strive to measure the dignity of her Divine Son. For the

[1] III. Kings, iv. 29.

Divine Maternity can have no other measure than that Infinite One in Whom it terminates. To comprehend it, therefore, you must needs comprehend the Incarnate Word. You must understand what is meant by a Man Who is God, a God Who is Man—that sublimest work of Uncreated Power and Love wherein the Maker included Himself in His own work, that it might be the highest and greatest of all His works.

The Only-Begotten Son of God—He Who from all eternity received in the bosom of the Father Being without beginning, and Who willed to take upon Himself in the bosom of this Mother new being beginning in time—can alone understand the endless height of the dignity that belongs to His Mother. *He hath created her in the Holy Ghost, He hath seen and numbered and measured.*[2]

He Who has formed her from the beginning and entirely for Himself, knows the riches of the gifts He has created in her; and He alone fully knows her dignity. Apart from Him no other may hope to reach up to this high understanding. "So great is the dignity of the Blessed Virgin that it is reserved to God alone to know it," says St. Bernardine. What we may say is but as the lisping of children.

The Maternity of Mary may be considered in two ways—as it is in the natural order of things, and as it is in the order of grace.

The former is the less to be esteemed, and yet

[2] Ecclesiasticus, i. 9.

we are overburdened by its weight of glory. For, in the natural order of things, the Blessed Virgin entered into relationship with God in the first and closest degree. This is called "affinity" by St. Thomas, and from this he proves that there is due to the Virgin Mary that special worship called *Hyperdulia.**

There are other grave theologians who maintain that this relationship with God may be called "consanguinity" [blood-relationship], in the exact sense of the word and in the first degree, such as is the connection of every mother with her son. This is verified all the more in the relation of the Virgin Mary to the Incarnate Word, inasmuch as, in His created generation, she was His only Parent, and thus at once Mother and Father to Him.

[Christ, having no earthly father, drew all the substance of His Body and Blood from Mary His Mother, through the operation of the Holy Ghost. All that is here said is simply the literal explanation of that part of the Apostles' Creed which says that *Jesus Christ, the only Son* of God, *our Lord, was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary.*]

That first substance of the Body of the Redeemer was formed from the most pure blood of the Virgin

* [That unique adoration which is due only to God is called *latria:* the veneration due to God's Angels and Saints, *dulia;* and to the Blessed Virgin, from her peculiar relation to God, *hyperdulia.*]

Mary; and from her was the nutrition with which It was developed during His nine months' stay in her chaste womb, and the virginal milk with which His later growth was nourished. And it was this substance which, by particular Providence, being once united to the Divine Word, remained always the Body of the Incarnate God.[3] Here wonders and marvels are heaped upon us, as St. Peter Damian exclaims in admiration. That great Lord Who is in all things by His Immensity, in three ways—by His Essence, His Presence, and His Power—is in the Blessed Virgin after another manner, which is beyond all comprehension closer than the mere tie of blood; namely, "by having the same substance as herself."

Even apart from this, the Virgin Mary should be looked on as forming one thing with her Divine Offspring, just as the gardener considers his tree and its fruit to be one and the same property, and just as parents form legally but one person with their child. With this added privilege, however, the union of the Blessed Virgin with her Son increases beyond measure; for by this, in a certain way, she is not only in blood-relationship with Jesus Christ, but she is as it were of one bodily substance with Him. These are the words attributed to St. Augustine: "The flesh of Christ is the flesh of Mary." *

[3] See, in theology of *Incarnation*, Suarez, Vega, Vasquez, Pineda, Canisius.

* [It should be noted here that it is through Mary alone that Christ has that *communication* with us *in flesh and blood* of

St. Peter Damian was therefore right when he cried out for very wonder: "Here let every creature be silent and tremble; nor let anyone dare to gaze on the boundless height of this dignity."

Yet, as has been said, the esteem due to the Divine Maternity in this natural order of things is less than that which belongs to it in the order of grace. For here, in a certain way, it comes within the order of the Hypostatic Union [that *personal* union of the Divine and human natures in the Son of God—the Second Person of the Trinity—which constitutes the God-man or Incarnate Word, Jesus Christ. *The Word was God . . . and the Word was made Flesh.*[4]] With this Union the Divine Maternity of Mary has an intrinsic relation and a necessary connection.

Hence there is no created gift which can exceed this dignity, just as no creature can rise above her in rank of station. Once you have found the Mother of God, if you go further on you can find only God Himself.

This truth has always filled the Holy Doctors with an ecstasy of mind that appears in their pages, and makes it easy to give examples of their reverent admiration of the Divine Maternity. . . . .

[The author here gives a number of brief quotations from the Fathers and Doctors of the Church.

which St. Paul speaks, *Hebrews, ii.* 14; for by His Mother only is He of our race.]

[4] St. John, i.

With the exception of St. Methodius Martyr, the Apostle of Christianity among the Slavonic races, these authorities have been already cited in the preceding pages. The sum of their testimony is found in these words of St. Bernard: "Among sons that are born there can be none greater than Christ; and so among mothers there can be none greater than Mary."]

But we should never end, were we to try to gather together all the praises which the Saints have given to the Maternity of Mary. It is enough to say that the Mother of God is so high exalted that she herself—though enlightened with a greater knowledge than the Seraphim in heaven—cannot fully comprehend the dignity which is hers. She too, as well as all others, is in the *overshadowing* of that light which the Angel declared should shine upon her from the Holy Ghost: *The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee; and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee.*[5]

A page was asked—"What is God?" He gave the wise answer: "If I could tell what God is, either God would not be God or else I should be God." So, if we are asked what the Mother of God is, we may answer: "If I were able to comprehend her dignity, either she would not be Mother of God, or I should be above the Mother of God, who herself does not comprehend it!"

[5] St. Luke, i. 35.

II.

The merit entitling to this high dignity.

THAT which is most worthy of esteem in any dignity is not the mere possession of it, but the having merited it. To hold a station of esteem without doing anything to deserve it, is to be like the lilies of the field with the glory of their whiteness: *They toil not, neither do they spin;* but *God hath so clothed them.*[6] This is a blessing given rather than the outcome of virtue. It is to inherit a kingdom rather than to conquer it.

Not thus was the high privilege of Mary. She not only reached the utmost limit to which a pure creature can come, by being the Mother of God, but her coming to this dignity was with merit of her own. We must enter into this depth of light, however, step by step, lest we should lose our way at the very beginning.

The learned distinguish two kinds of merit. One is merit by strict justice, and is called *de condigno;* the other is merit by reason of the fitness of things, and is called *de congruo.* [Thus, in common English speech, we say that "*condign* punishment, or a *fitting* reward, is *merited.*"]

Now it is beyond doubt that the Blessed Virgin Mary had this latter merit of fitness to be the Mother

[6] St. Luke, xii. 27, 28.

of God. St. Thomas confesses this in the name of all: "Supposing that the Incarnation was to be wrought, she deserved that it should be wrought through her, not by merit *de condigno* [in strict justice] but *de congruo*" [because the dispositions of her will rendered it fitting that she should be chosen]. And this is the least which the Holy Fathers can have meant, when they exalt so loudly the merits of the Blessed Virgin to be chosen as Mother of the Most High. [The author cites, among others, St. Basil the Great, from the Greek Fathers, and St. Augustine and St. Gregory from the Latin.] Of the same kind are the testimonies borne by the other Saints to the merits of Mary.

From all this many theologians, both ancient and modern,[7] have thought that the Virgin Mary had even, in a way, justly merited the Divine Maternity. Let us reason a little concerning this.

[The question here proposed—if question there be—is purely speculative, and really concerns only the form of words. But its consideration by the author brings into clear light an essential point of the fitness of the Blessed Virgin to be the Mother of the Incarnate Word. This is the "merit" of her own *free* act of faith and obedience rendered to the words of the Angel who, in the name of God, announced to her that she should become the Mother of *the Son of the Most High*. God had prepared her for this by freely bestowing upon her, in the first creation of her

[7] Cited by Vega.

soul, those wonderful graces which make up the mystery of her Immaculate Conception. But the actual becoming Man of God the Son in her chaste womb was not to be wrought without her consent. Hence the Angel was sent to make special revelation to her of the great mystery, and God meanwhile awaited her free consent.

Angel. *Fear not, Mary, for* THOU HAST FOUND GRACE WITH GOD. *Behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus.*

Mary. *How shall this be done? because I know not man.*

Angel. *The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee; and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore, also, the Holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.*

Mary. BEHOLD THE HANDMAID OF THE LORD, BE IT DONE TO ME ACCORDING TO THY WORD.[8]

This, though in infinitely less measure, is the history of the workings of the Holy Ghost in the meritorious acts of every Christian. First, by God's great goodness, the Christian has been put in the *state* of grace. Then the *actual* grace of God is bestowed on him, enlightening the understanding and giving strength to the will. But after all this, the free will must act and consent, as did the Blessed Virgin, to be *the servant of the Lord.* For this reason, perhaps, Providence has put these words of Mary, on

[8] St. Luke, i. 30–38.

which her merit is based, in the mouths of all Christians in the daily prayer of the *Angelus.*]

In the present case, only two things are required as a basis for merit in strict justice. [It is understood, in accordance with elementary Catholic doctrine, that when merit before God is said to be a matter of *justice*, this is because God has *bound Himself* by His promises to reward certain acts of the free will of man working in correspondence with His grace.] First of all, on the side of God, it must be His will to give His Divine Son to a created Mother, *on certain conditions.* Secondly, the creature, on its side, must perfectly fulfil *these conditions for becoming such a Mother.*

Now, what have we here? One of the highest Angels in Paradise is chosen to be the intervening agent of this sublime contract. On the part of the Most Holy Trinity he offers to the Virgin Mary the Maternity of the Incarnate Word, with this condition; namely, she, with perfect faith in the divine message and perfect obedience to the divine will, must consent that her virginal breast shall be the bridal-chamber of these Heavenly Nuptials. On the part of the Virgin Mary this consent is given, with so generous faith, so firm confidence, so deep humility, so heroic obedience, so circumspect prudence, so lofty magnanimity, and with such exceeding charity and so great virtues joined in that one act, that they are morally in just proportion with the Divine Espousals.

What is wanting here to strict merit? In this adorable contract both the parties to it mutually fulfil their respective agreements. God promises the Maternity to the Virgin Mary on condition that she consents worthily; and the Blessed Virgin accepts His promise with so meritorious an act of consent that, if she had not been already worthy, she would have now become so. This is St. Bonaventure's summing up of the question: "After she had given consent and the Holy Ghost in the abundance of grace had come upon her, she had not only the merit of fitness, but that of strict worthiness for this high dignity."

In any case, if Mary did not merit in strict justice the high dignity of Mother of God, this was not because her virtues were not in just proportion with the height of this dignity; but simply because God had not directed them to this end. For the rest, once it was determined that God should become Man, if it had pleased the Lord to propose this great honor of becoming His Mother as a prize of sanctity, Mary would surely have borne off the prize by the immensity of her merits.

Who can understand how greatly this one thing exalts the honor of the Blessed Virgin? Before the manna fell from heaven there came a plentiful dew, like a napkin of purest white, to make the earth fit to receive that work of Angels. But who shall tell the purity and holiness of disposition which, in the

Heart of Mary, went before the coming of the Incarnate Word, that she might receive Him fitly?

St. Anselm says: "It was meet that she should shine with such purity that, under God, none greater can be conceived." And St. Gregory: "That she might attain to the conception of the Eternal Word, she reached up with her merits to the very throne of God." And St. Bernardine: "That a woman should conceive and bring forth God, is the miracle of miracles. For this it was necessary that the Virgin should be lifted up to what we may say was a kind of equality with God, by perfections, as it were, infinite and such as no creature had ever known before."

And we too—shall we not lift up our voices with the woman of the Gospel in loud praise? *Blessed is the womb that bore Thee, and the breasts that gave Thee suck!* And if blessed the womb which gave human being to the Eternal Word, and blessed those fountains of life which nourished Him with their milk, how much more blessed must be that Heart which merited so great a good!

III.

The blessings received from this high dignity.

THE Divine Maternity is as a heavenly mine that cannot but give forth its riches. Let us consider

the treasures which the Blessed Virgin has brought forth from it for herself, for us, and even for God's own glory.

First, in regard to herself, it won for her from the start a universal kingdom over nature and grace. St. John Damascene [Doctor of the Eastern Church] says of this: "Mary was made Queen of all created things when she became Mother of the Creator."

Yet it is very little that the kingdom of the Blessed Virgin should be extended over all creatures, since it reaches even to the very Creator of them. This St. Bernardine points out: "It is a necessary truth that all things, including the Virgin Mary, are the servants of God's power; but it is also true that the Virgin has all things in the service of her power, even God Himself." For it is true that Christ, Who is God, has thus subjected Himself to His Mother. *And He was subject to them* [says the Gospel, of His life in Nazareth with His Mother and St. Joseph].[9]

It may be said here that the Divinity of Christ so exalted His Human Nature as to exempt it from every created authority, even from the authority of His Mother. Thus the obedience which He gave her would be the free service of His will, and not that subjection which children owe in justice to their parents. But, to answer this, it is enough to say that the obedience of children to their parents is in no wise opposed to the liberty of the children; on the contrary, it is obedience freely given and full of

[9] St. Luke, ii. 51.

filial love. And therefore this obedience was in Christ, as was every other obligation of the natural law, without any prejudice to His dignity. This is all the truer from the fact that such subjection enters into the very name of Son; and so, to deny that Christ was subject to His Mother, would be to deny that the Virgin Mary was Mother of Christ.

Here too the Blessed Virgin stands alone. For what ruler had ever subjects like hers? It was the ancient law that the greatness and honor of the governor of a city was to be measured by the greatness of his subjects. Now, the Blessed Virgin's rule could not reach higher than to have God subject to her. St. Bernard says: "This is wonderful on every side; that God should obey a Woman is unexampled humility—that a Woman should command God is unequalled grandeur."

The Lord declared His power to Job by saying of the immensity of the ocean: *As with the swaddling clothes of childhood I have wrapped it round and about.* How then shall Mary glory, inasmuch as she has wrapped *in swaddling clothes* the Almighty One Himself, after giving Him the new being of His Humanity which He had not before?[10]

In the second place, for whose benefit does the Blessed Virgin use her power? It is the rule with human dignities that they take from mind all remembrance of another's needs. When the cup-bearer of Pharaoh was restored to his former post, he at

[10] Job, xxxviii. 9; St. Luke, ii. 7.

once forgot Joseph the benefactor to whom he owed it.

Not thus is the great Heart of Mary. Equal to the grandeur which she has won for herself is the tender affection she has gained for us. She has become the Mother of as many sons by adoption as Jesus was to have for His brethren. She is the Mother of the Divine Head; she must also be the Mother of the members. She conceived and brought forth the natural Body of the Redeemer; it is right that she should conceive and bring forth His mystical Body made up of those He has redeemed. The Virgin's womb has brought forth her Divine Son; and thenceforward it has become so fruitful that, after the Saviour's Wounds, to her is due the numberless offspring of the elect. The first Eve—the Mother of the dead—has slain many; but as many have been raised again to life by Mary, the second Eve—the Mother of the living.

Last of all, there are no bounds to the glory which the Blessed Virgin gives to God by her Maternity.

In the old times, the highest title given to God was to call Him *the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob;* or, if anyone wished yet further to exalt His name, He was called *the God of hosts*, that is, of the Angels who form His armies. Yet all this amounted only to calling Him the Sovereign Lord of weak creatures.

But, when the Virgin had clothed with Human

Flesh the Eternal Word, God so enlarged His dominion that He gained a Subject of infinite perfection. For Christ, in the Humanity He had thus taken on Himself, was less than the Father—[*The Father is greater than I*]—and so God the Father is become God of God. And God the Son, inasmuch as he is also Man, can say to the Father—Thou art My God: *My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?*[11]

This new dominion is over a Subject Who is Himself of infinite grandeur; and in this new title the Father glories, saying to Christ by His prophet: *Thou art My Servant, because I shall glory in Thee.* And Christ, in turn, by the mouth of David, reminds Him that this glory comes to Him from the Virgin's womb: *From My Mother's womb Thou art My God.*[12]

Thus God's dominion has not simply been multiplied through the Virgin Mary, but it has reached the uttermost limit to which it can ever come—to the having subject to itself a Man-God Who is at once the equal and the inferior of the Most High!

Meanwhile the Heart of Mary is the fitting throne of all these grandeurs, so incomprehensible to our sight. It is right to hail her: "O worthy one of the All Worthy, beautiful one of the All Beauti-

[11] St. John, xiv. 28; St. Mark, xv. 34.
[12] Isaias, xlix. 3; Psalm xxi. 11.

ful, pure one of the Holiest, great one of the Most High." [13]

To measure thy merit we must fix our gaze on God's own greatness; for thou art in due proportion with the Eternal Word Whom thou hast brought forth—"O worthy one of the All Worthy!" To know the measure of thy beauty we must comprehend the grace of *the Most Beautiful of the sons of men* [14] —"O beautiful one of the All Beautiful!" To measure thy sanctity we must look upon the Infinite Holiness of Jesus Christ, to which thy immaculate existence draws nigh so far as is possible to a created being—"O great one of the Most High!" For the height of thy dignity finds its measure in the very Throne of God.

[The preceding chapter is but a detailed explanation of these verses of the Church's Passion Hymn—*Pange, lingua, gloriosi.*

The fulness of the holy time
Unto the world was come:
From heaven the Father sent His Son
Down to the Virgin's womb,
Whence the Creator of the earth,
Clothed with our flesh, came forth.

The wailing Babe is laid within
The manger's narrow bound:
With swaddling clothes the Mother wraps
His childish limbs around;
That Virgin binds the feet and hands
Of God, with circling bands.]

[13] Richard of St. Laurence. [14] Psalm xliv. 3.

CHAPTER III.

THE DEEP OCEAN OF GRACE.

[*Her thought overfloweth from the sea, and her counsel from the great deep.*—Ecclesiasticus, xxiv. 39.]

I.

The greatness of the first grace bestowed on the Blessed Virgin.

THE ocean is nowhere bottomless; yet there are places which no plummet can fathom. So the grace of the Virgin Mary is an ocean which indeed has its limits—for it is the grace of a creature—but we can never fully find out its depth.

For this reason the Saints speak of it as boundless, or again as beyond belief, or even as infinite. Thus St. Bernard, who is cited by St. Thomas, says: "God has made her infinitely like to His own goodness." And St. Bernardine: "Mary has entered into the deepest abyss of God's wisdom, beyond all our belief; so that, as far as the condition of a pure creature allows—that is, without the personal union [which is found only in Christ the God-Man]—she is lost to sight in that *Light inaccessible*."[1]

[1] I. Timothy, vi. 16.

St. Bonaventure also reasons in this way: "The grace of which the Blessed Virgin was full, was beyond measure. For the boundless deep cannot be filled unless by that which is immeasurable."

By this manner of speaking, the Saints do not mean that the riches of grace which are in Mary have not their own limits, but that the created mind cannot reach to comprehend them. Yet it is good for us to enter into these depths; it can only edify the spirit to be lost therein for very wonder.

We may divide up the grace bestowed on the Virgin Mary in three parts: the first, that which was given her in her Immaculate Conception, at the first moment of her existence; the second, that which was added to this during the course of her life; and the third, that which she had at the end as the result of her co-operation with the grace thus given her—for she had multiplied it many times over in her soul.

The first grace was given to Mary in that most blessed moment when she was created holy and immaculate. It contained in itself so great a sum of graces that none of the Saints on earth, none of the Angels in heaven, have possessed its like in their richest treasures of grace. No soul devout to the Blessed Virgin can have a doubt of this, and the theologians are agreed upon it. Their leader is Suarez who, to the honor of Mary, has developed this great privilege from the sayings of the Fathers, from reason, and from the Holy Scriptures.

The Lord hath loved the gates of Sion more than

all the tabernacles of Jacob. Why have the very gates of the beautiful Sion been more pleasing to our Lord than all the edifices brought to their perfection by Jacob? To show us that the first steps in life of this great Virgin were lovelier in the eyes of the Creator than the last end of the career of the other Saints. For a like reason, this City of God has *its foundations on the holy mountains.*[2] Thus we may see how the Blessed Virgin's perfection took its rise from the highest summit reached by the other Saints.

Last of all, the same motive leads the Divine Spouse to give His first praise to His chosen one—not for the loveliness of her countenance, though it might serve as a mirror to the Seraphim—but for her footsteps and the sandals of her feet. *How beautiful are thy steps in the sandals of thy feet, O Daughter of the King?*[3]

O chosen one, thou art not the slave of sin, but Queen; for thou art the Daughter of the King Most High, and thou art predestined to be one day His Mother. *How beautiful* and full of majesty *are thy steps in the sandals of thy feet!* For the first entrance of this Virgin into the world, her first step forward as one of earth's travellers toward the Highest Good, was a sight of such grace and goodliness that the earth has never seen the like; and God Himself has wished to make known His admiration. *How beautiful are thy steps!*

[2] Psalm lxxxvi. 1, 2. [3] Canticles vii. 1.

Who shall tell the extent of this first treasure of grace given to the Virgin Mary? The highest Angel surpasses, in natural gifts, the almost numberless throng of Angels inferior to him. So too, as the Angelic Doctor St. Thomas teaches, it is likely that he surpasses them all in the gifts of grace; for these have been distributed in due proportion with the gifts of nature. Hence the riches of grace belonging to the highest Seraph are so immeasurable that, of themselves, they might suffice for an entire world in the spiritual order. Yet they are in no wise greater than that first grace given to the Blessed Virgin when she came from the hands of her Maker.

But we should not speak thus timidly where the Saints have spoken with such boldness. "The distinction between the Mother of God and the Servants of God is unmeasured," says St. John Damascene. Between the servants and the Queen there should not only be no equality, but even no resemblance. And the stars of the Church's beautiful heavens have not together, in their fullest shining, that light which this Aurora of God's rising had at her first dawn.

Certainly, he who does not stand in amazement here is without understanding; but, also, he whose wonder would make him incredulous has never known the just measure of that City of God—His Virgin Mother. The Angel of the Apocalypse has taken this measure for us: *He that spoke with me had a golden measuring-reed, that he might measure the City*

and its gates. And the City is placed in a square, and its length is as much as is its breadth.[4]

Here there are as many mysterious meanings as there are words. First, the City was laid out in a square, reaching as far one way as the other. This tells us that, great as is the dignity of the Virgin Mary, so great are the gifts bestowed on her, without there being the slightest inequality or disproportion between these two measures. And this comes from a principle laid down as certain by all theologians. It is stated by St. Bernardine: "Whenever God chooses to raise a person to some high station, He confers on him beforehand all those qualities which are required to fit him for that station." Of this the Apostle assures us, when he says—*He hath made us fit ministers of the New Testament;* and David had said the same before—*He hath placed His help in the powerful.*[5]

The Divine Maternity reaches up to the Infinite God. It comes nearest to the dignity of the Incarnate Son of God, Who takes human flesh from this Virgin Mother. With Him it enters, in a certain way, into the order of the Hypostatic Union [by which the divine and human natures subsist united in the Second Person of the Trinity—the Incarnate Son of God, Christ, our Lord].

Now infinite grace was imparted to Christ, because there was nothing intervening between Him

[4] Apocalypse, xxi. 15.

[5] II. Corinthians, iii. 6; Psalm lxxxviii. 20.

and the Divinity. It was but right, therefore, that the image of His infinity of grace should be reflected in the Mother who came next to this Divine Son. Thus between these two there would be a correspondence of merit, so that she whom the Eternal Word was to call Mother would be worthy of His honor.

Accordingly, the *golden reed*, with which the *City* of the Lord—the Virgin Mary—is to be *measured*, is the Sacred Humanity of our Redeemer. He is as a reed by the weakness of the earthly human nature; but He is as gold by the pricelessness of the Divine Nature. And with the dignity of this Man-God—with the gifts of His lower Human Nature united to the Divinity in one and the same Divine Person, with merits infinitely infinite—must be measured the grace bestowed on His Mother, even from the beginning of her existence. To this measure she is found equal—in the high charge given her in the great gifts received by her, in the extent of the merits with which she corresponded to them.

Of course, this equality cannot be absolute; for what can equal the Infinite? But it is an equality of fitness and proportion; so that, as nothing was wanting to Christ which was fitting to Him Who was Son of God by nature, nothing also is wanting to her who is the true Mother of the same God.

In a word, when there is question of estimating the greatness of the Blessed Virgin, we have to fix our gaze, not on creatures, but on the Creator alone.

"Whatever is beneath God, cannot come into comparison with Mary," says Richard of St. Laurence. Every other measure disappears, adds St. Sophronius: "As in comparison with God no man is good, so in comparison with the Mother of God no other creature is found perfect."

It is true that the Virgin Mary, at the first dawn of life, was not yet Mother of God. But, as has been said, she had been chosen out from the beginning to be the Mother of the Divine Word. Hence St. Bernard assures us: "In that moment of her Conception she was more loved by God than all the other Saints, because she was to be His Mother."

For this reason the Sacred Canticles compare the Virgin Mother to the pomegranate which, alone of all fruits, buds forth with a crown. And of her the Prophet says: *A Flower shall spring up from her root.* For the beauteous Flower of the Incarnate Word, to give priceless worth to the Tree which was to bring Him forth, waited not till it should be full grown. But from its very root—from its first springing up in the earth—He chose it to be His own. *He shall come forth from the root of Jesse; and as a flower He shall spring up from this root.*[6]

Now, if the foundations of this Temple of the Divinity were of such priceless value, we can go on to understand what must be the worth of the edifice which rises fair above them.

[6] Isaias, xi. 1.

II.

Gifts added by God to this first grace.

Our Lord gives us His divine grace in two ways: one is according to the disposition of our own merits, and is said to be *ex opere operantis* [grace merited by the *personal act* of the one who does the good work]; the other is a gift of His pure liberality, and is *ex opere operato* [grace attached to the *work itself* which is done, as in the Sacraments, in virtue of God's ordinance].

Grace given to the Virgin Mary after this second manner forms a great part of the rich treasure God has bestowed on her; it is also an addition to that first grace which has elsewhere no equal.

In the regular course of things, grace of this kind is received through the Sacraments; [and the Blessed Virgin, like all other Christians from the beginning, found in these the channels of divine grace. What is here said is drawn not only from Christian tradition of those first days of the Church, but from what must have been the life of Christ's first and nearest and most faithful disciple—His Mother Mary.][7]

Who can understand the fulness of this grace conferred on the Virgin Mary when she received Baptism at the hands of her Divine Son? Or when

[7] See Suarez, on the *Incarnation.*

she received Confirmation at the feast of Pentecost along with the Apostles, but with interior dispositions of charity greater beyond measure than could be found in the Apostles and all the Saints together? Or again, when she received the Extreme Unction before going forth from this life to mount up into heaven?

Yet what can all this have been in comparison with the rich gifts that were poured forth into her Heart during the twenty-four years which she lived after the institution of the Divine Eucharist? The Blessed Sacrament was received by her as her *daily Bread*, as was the custom of the first faithful; and this was still more fitting in her, for Jesus Christ had left on earth this *Bread from heaven* for her sake more especially than for other just souls.[8]

St. Catharine of Sienna, as she knelt at the Holy Table, saw more than once, in the hands of the priest who was about to give her the Communion, a flame of fire figuring the love with which our Redeemer comes to unite Himself with our souls. Thus our Lord said to St. Bridget—"I come as a Spouse"—that is, with every loving affection and every perfect gift. From this we may reason what must have been the gifts and what the love, which passed between the Mother of God and her Divine Son each time that she knelt at this Holy Table; and what new flames must have been added to the fire of charity which already burned so brightly in the Heart of Mary.

[8] Acts, i. 14, ii. 46; Wisdom, xvi. 20.

St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi had so great an esteem of this *Food of the Angels*, that she was used to say—"A single Communion would be enough to make us Saints, if we only knew how to dispose ourselves rightly for it." How then must the Blessed Virgin have *lifted herself up above herself*,[9] each time that she received her Son in the Blessed Sacrament! For every day brought with it an immeasurable growth in holiness; and thus every day she received Him with a higher disposition and with more grace than she had received Him that first time, when He was made Man in her virginal womb.

Some think the Sacramental Species were not consumed in her so soon as in other Christians, but remained unchanged till the following day when she again received our Lord. Thus her Heart would be an animated shrine, a living Tabernacle of the Blessed Sacrament. If this be so, what constant heat of charity would be enkindled in the Virgin's breast by that Uncreated Sun Which had no setting there! Our own sun, in the lands where it shines the longest, gives forth such heat as to burn up the vegetation and scorch the very sands. And who shall tell the fiery heat of love wrought in the Heart of Mary by that Lord Who says of Himself—*So long as I am in the world, I am the Light of the world?*[10] For with His unbroken shining He kept therein a never-ending day of charity.

After this, it may be thought we can have noth-

[9] Lamentations, iii. 28. [10] St. John, ix. 5.

ing further to add; and yet we are only at the beginning. For this is the place to say with the Wise Man—*When a man hath finished, then shall he begin.*[11] It is as one that climbs a high mountain: when he thinks to reach the top, he discovers other and higher peaks yet to be ascended.

The kind of grace of which we now speak [*ex opere operato*] was not given to the Blessed Virgin only when she received the Sacraments. Many times over, through the whole course of her life, it had been given her—at the taking place of the chief mysteries of our Saviour's life—and in the more considerable services she had rendered Him, when she brought Him forth and nursed Him as a Child, when she served Him and accompanied Him in the fulness of His age.

In His Conception the Incarnate Word espoused to Himself our human nature, and these blessed nuptials were made in the Virgin's womb. It was then He brought with Him from heaven to her bosom so rich a dower of grace that to some it has seemed incapable of growing greater—as if by this alone the Blessed Virgin had reached the goal of her perfection!

This, though not the truth, may yet serve as a measure and guide in appreciating the treasures of grace which she received at the Resurrection of her Divine Son, at His Ascension into heaven, at the Descent of the Holy Ghost on the Church, and on

[11] Ecclesiasticus, xviii. 6.

other like occasions. At such times grace was showered down upon the others; but for the Blessed Virgin it was the opening of the flood-gates of Paradise.

Besides all this, it is to be believed that the whole life of the Virgin Mary was one constant growth in grace from these gifts of God's liberality; and this was quite apart from the grace merited by the acts of her virtues. For she lived constantly in the company of that Lord Who left the tokens of His loving kindness wherever He went. *He passed doing good*—healing souls with the same touch with which He cured the bodies, so that He might say: *I have made the whole man sound.*[12]

Thus the Blessed Virgin was in daily and close familiarity with Christ her Son. She was in continual contact with His Divine Body, she cared for Him and nourished Him with her milk, and she held Him closely to her breast. "Who, unless he were deficient in understanding," says Blessed Canisius, "would doubt that she became herself holier and more like to God from this daily contact with her Divine Son?"

It is our duty, therefore, to reverence the Heart of Mary as a deep Ocean of Grace, if only for this reason—that such treasures of grace were poured forth therein. The abounding riches of the Blessed Virgin may be known from the times without num-

[12] Acts, x. 38; St. John, vii. 23.

ber in which the highest treasures of Paradise were given into her bosom.

III.

The Blessed Virgin's co-operation multiplying the graces bestowed on her.

With her co-operation the Blessed Virgin increased many times over the grace bestowed upon her. To consider this rightly, we must go far out upon the Ocean whereon we have thus far not lost sight of shore. To have some idea of the final result, we must seek out, in this blessed work, that which came from the operations of the Virgin Mary and that which was due to our Lord's liberality.

Three things are required by the merchants of this world: an extensive capital to work upon, a long period of time in which to traffic, and great industry in profiting by every opportunity of gain. With these they may come into the possession of princely riches.

The capital, or first treasure, of the Blessed Virgin was beyond reckoning; for, from the beginning, her *foundations were on the holy mountains*—that is, she began from the highest point which the other Saints reached only at the end.

The time of her divine traffic was for the more than sixty-two years of her life. For she set herself

to the labor from the first moment of her Immaculate Conception, at which time she received the use of reason—unless we are to say that a privilege was denied to the Queen which was bestowed on the servants. In Adam and in the Angels the beginning of life was also the beginning of merit; and it must have been the same for Mary.

Now in the long stretch of years which she passed on earth, she never ceased the multiplying of her merits. Even in sleep the work must have gone on; for, among her other privileges, was that sublimest degree of knowledge infused by the Holy Ghost which needs not to use those images of the brain that are bound up in sleep. Thus the workings of the intellect would continue on unbroken by sleep. At least, this is the sleep which St. Augustine claims belonged to man in the state of innocence: "His sleeping was as blessed as our life waking;" and it would be rashness to deny it to the Virgin Mother of Innocence Itself. In this way the mind of Mary was like those highest mountain peaks on which the sun still shines when it has long since set on the plains below. *I sleep, and my Heart waketh.*[13]

Her industry in this labor of meriting was also the greatest possible, for there was found in her no indifferent or indeliberate act. This was because of the perfect dominion she had over her faculties and their operations. Still less was there to be found in

[13] Canticles, v. 2.

her any blameworthy act, or even any imperfection. She ever acted with all the strength of the actual graces given her at the time, and with all the virtue of the habits of grace which had been infused into her or which she had acquired. Moreover, the stimulus of sin and every other hindrance to well-doing were quite wanting in her. So she must have gone forward in her meriting like the light of day that, in a moment, reaches to the limits of the horizon.

There is still something to be added to this. It is the help which our Lord, on His side, gave to the Virgin His Mother in her labor of multiplying her treasures of grace.

Here we must first lay down a certain truth concerning the increase of the habit of charity in the soul. [The "habit" of charity is that quality or principle in the soul which renders it capable of producing supernatural acts of the virtue. This habit is wrought or "infused" in the soul by the Holy Ghost, and constitutes the "theological virtue" of charity; and the acts proceeding from this habit, under the influence of actual grace, are supernatural "good works" and "meritorious" of eternal life by an "increase of grace."]

The habit of charity increases in us in the degree of the fervor with which we produce acts of charity; and, consequently, grace increases in us in the same measure, since grace is inseparable from charity. This is declared by Suarez: "Acts of charity are

meritorious of an increase of the same charity, and consequently of grace and glory, in the full extent of the degrees of the act; so that, if the act is as four, then a fourfold increase of grace is merited, and so on for the rest."

We have the illustration of this in the *good and faithful servants* praised by our Lord in the Gospels. One of them had used the two talents given him, and he was able to say: *Behold, I have gained other two;* and he to whom five talents had been entrusted had, in like manner, gained five other talents.[14]

This helps us to understand the great liberality of our Lord in giving out His treasures of grace. It goes so far that He never suffers Himself to be surpassed by the efforts of His faithful souls; but, with the intensity of their acts of virtue, He increases the intensity of their supernatural habits in the same measure. Thus the treasure of sanctifying grace is constantly multiplying with all those who faithfully correspond with the aids of actual grace bestowed on them.

It is well also to notice that, where there is question of thus constantly doubling a given quantity, we soon reach a sum that is beyond the utmost grasp of human thought. [The examples here given belong to a somewhat obsolete system of natural science; but it is mathematically correct, and is found in many of the older authors, whose painstaking in working it out is worthy of admiration. Its essential

[14] St. Matthew, xxv. 14–30.

truth makes it an effective illustration of a great truth in the spiritual life—that of the Christian's increase of merit, or *the laying up of treasure in heaven.*[15]]

If a merchant were to begin his traffic with a single gold-piece, and to succeed so prosperously that each day he would double the gains of all the preceding days, in sixty-four days he would have more millions of gold pieces than all the princes of the earth together—more than nature has ever produced in all her mines—so many, in a word, that put together they would form a massive globe more than sixty times greater than the whole earth!

In the same way of calculating the increase of grace, not even the Seraphim in heaven would be able to understand the fulness of that deep Ocean of Grace and Charity which is contained in the Heart of Mary.

The infused habit increased in the Blessed Virgin in proportion with her acts of charity; and her acts were in proportion to the intensity of the habit. Therefore by the merit of her actions she was constantly doubling the grace already possessed by her.

Suppose that the Mother of God, at the moment of her Immaculate Conception, had received no more grace than is received by a babe in baptism; and after this, that she had doubled her *talent* only once every hour, by working as she was wont to do with all the activity of her powers and the habits and aids of grace. Before the end of her sixth day of life she

[15] St. Matthew, vi. 20.

would have acquired as many degrees of merit and sanctity as the grains of sand needed to make up one thousand and twenty-four worlds equal to our own!

What then must we think when we remember that she did not begin her heavenly traffic with grace of a single degree, but with a treasure of grace in proportion to her future dignity of Mother of God? And it was not in this short time of a few days that she was occupied in doubling this treasure, but through the whole course of her sixty-three years. The rule also of her working was not merely once in every hour, but a continual working that was not broken in upon even by sleep. It was a working without any hindrance in the way of her laying up new riches of grace. It was not so much the running forward to the goal as a flight of incredible swiftness —like the Angels who, because they are pure spirits free from bodily fetters, co-operate with grace with the fulness of their powers. In this way a few moments' increase brings to a treasure beyond reckoning.

Certainly, every instant of the Blessed Virgin's life was thus worth many centuries; so much so that the final act of charity with which she terminated her mortal life surpassed the merit of all that had gone before taken together. This is the teaching of the great theologian, Suarez: "At the end of her life the Blessed Virgin could merit by a single act as many degrees of grace as she had gained in the whole time

of her previous life by all the acts and in all the ways of her sanctification and increase in grace."

We may therefore repeat here that the grace of the Virgin Mary can indeed be measured, for it is a created grace; but it can be measured only by the Creator. We may not call it infinite, but we may give it every other title of praise; and we can reverence her Immaculate Heart as the deep Ocean of boundless Grace. This fulfils the words which the Wise Man uttered in her name: *I am as the way of boundless waters.*[16]

[16] Ecclesiasticus, xxiv. 41.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LIVING IMAGE OF THE HEART OF CHRIST.

[*For she is the image of His goodness.*—Wisdom, vii. 26.]

I.

The Virgin Mary the first of the predestined with Christ.

ANOTHER sublime privilege of the Blessed Virgin is that she is the express image of her Divine Son—*the image of His goodness.*

Other mortals, according to St. Augustine, are *made to the image of God* because they have some trait of *likeness* with their Divine Original.[1] But the Virgin Mary is to be called His image because she is the living expression *of His goodness.* In His bodily features Christ is like to none other so much as to His Mother; and so, in the features of her soul, His Mother is like to no one so much as to Christ.

Hence the Heart of Mary must be said to have been formed to the likeness of the Heart of Jesus; and this was verified from the first in her predestination.

In His eternal decrees God resolved to impart

[1] Genesis, i. 26, 27.

His Divine Perfections to created beings. The first of these in order—there is not question of time—was His determination to become Man, by the personal communication of His Divinity outside of His own Being. Thus He would begin His works from the highest and most perfect and most wonderful of all that are possible—from the Man-God.

The Incarnate Word is therefore the first of the predestined in the Divine Mind. He is not predestined as the Son of God; but, being such, He is predestined as the Son of Man and, therefore, along with Him is predestined the Virgin who is to be His Mother. Thus the Virgin's destiny is a part of that of Jesus Christ; in a way, she enters with Him into the order of the Hypostatic Union [by which God is made Man]. She is of the same class with Him, as it were; and in the Eternal Forethought she holds the first place nearest to Him.

St. Bernardine says: "Thou wast predestined before every other creature in the mind of God, that from thy flesh thou mightest produce the very God as true Man."

For this reason the Blessed Virgin is so often called the *Sister* of the Divine Spouse in the Sacred Canticles. For this the Holy Church applies to her what is said in the Scriptures of Divine Wisdom; and the same titles are appropriated to her, such as *salvation, hope, life.*[2] This is not because they have the

[2] See, concerning application of Scripture texts to the Virgin Mary, *Summary* at end of volume.

same meaning in her as in Christ; but they point to that living and close likeness which she has with Him, and which can be common to her with none of the other Saints.

Let us lift our eyes to the natural heavens, and study the beauty of their order. The sun is the source of light—that *greater light* which illuminates all things from the lowest to the highest. Next comes the moon, which more than any other luminary shares in the sun's splendor, and is rightly called the *lesser light*.[3] And last of all are everywhere scattered the stars, in unequal brightness.

Now imagine that all this but pictures the Church's heavens, wherein God's predestination has observed like order. Jesus Christ is the Sun, for He is the First of the Predestined. Then comes the Blessed Virgin His Mother, as the Moon—another and lesser Sun. And around Christ and His Virgin Mother are the Saints shining, some more and some less brightly, as the Stars.

When the Blessed Virgin speaks of herself to us in the words of Scripture, she sometimes names herself before her Beloved and at other times names the Beloved first. *My Beloved is to me, and I to Him;* and then again, *I am to my Beloved, and He to me.*[4] This is to show the constant use of Heart answering to Heart between the Son and His Mother. Without this answering likeness, making of her His living image, she would not have been the worthy Mother

[3] Genesis, i. 16. [4] Canticles, ii. 16, vi. 2.

of the Redeemer. Anastasius, Monk of Mount Sinai, asks: "How should she be the Mother of such a Son unless she was in herself the entire and unbroken image of her Offspring?"

We ought also to remember that, if the Eternal Word had not come into the world to clothe Himself with Human Flesh, then Mary too would not have come to be His Mother. This is St. Ephrem's remark: "If God had not been made Flesh, why should Mary have been created in the world?" That is, the chief end for which the Blessed Virgin was formed—to be the companion of Jesus Christ—would have been wanting, and the Divine Wisdom would have had no motive for creating her on earth.

I am to my Beloved, and unto me is His turning.[5] There is so close a bond between Mary and the Incarnate Word, so intimate is the union of the Mother with her Divine Son, that without this Divine Fruit she—the heavenly Tree that bore It in time, and had been chosen for this alone by God from all eternity—would never have been created. "No other Mother was meet for such a Son," says Hugh of St. Victor; "nor could any other son be found for such a Mother." What wonder, then, that Mary should call Christ her very Heart? since she lived, not only by Him alone, but all in all for Him. *I sleep, and my Heart waketh.*[6]

[5] Canticles, vii. 10.

[6] Canticles, v. 2.

II.

The first of the redeemed by Christ.

WHOEVER acts has this as a prime end of all his operations—to work out something which shall correspond to himself. This was also the first aim of the Eternal Word, Who came on earth to work the transformation of all men in God, by means of charity. *I am come to scatter fire on earth.*[7]

But sin had placed a hindrance in the way of this divine flame, and He could perfectly attain His end only in the Heart of Mary. There sin had never entered, nor were any of its effects to be found there. Hence Christ could work therein as freely as He would; and His will was to work all that was fitting and due to a Divine Redemption.

St. Ambrose says: "When Christ was to redeem the world, He began His work with His Mother, that she through whom the Saviour was made ready for all men might herself reap the first-fruits in pledge of His salvation."

The Blessed Virgin was thus the Redeemer's first work—the first-fruits of the tree of the Cross—because she, more than all others, shared in the Redemption, and her share was had in a more perfect manner than that of all others.

As to the manner of her redemption, Christ did not wait till she should fall and die in order to raise

[7] St. Luke, xii. 49.

her up to life. She was not regenerated like others; but her first coming into existence was in the life of grace. The words of Scripture are said of her: *As the lily among thorns, so is my Beloved among the maidens.* And the commentator notes concerning this: "All others have a Deliverer, but He delivers them *after* they have already fallen victims; the Blessed Virgin has a Deliverer Who has preserved her *before* danger could come nigh."[8]

In the same way, she has a greater share in the Redemption than all others; for the Mother of God has grace in proportion to her high dignity. This is remarked by the Angelical Doctor St. Thomas; and its full meaning surpasses all created understanding, however perfect. We cannot reach up to comprehend or to measure the extent of this grace. It is so great that it touches on the infinite and the immeasurable. It is the greatest grace which God can give, according to that ordinary law which He has established for His working. For this law demands that the measure of His divine gifts shall be equal to the dignity and station for which the creature that is to receive them has been chosen.

With the Father St. Ildephonsus, therefore, we ought to bow the knee and hail this Blessed Virgin with the high title of Fruit of the Divine Incarnation—a fruit so perfect that it stands by itself alone:

[8] Canticles, ii. 2, Cusa; see also Salazar, on Proverbs, viii., xxxi.

"I bow before thee, thou only one—thou unique work wrought by God's Incarnation."

He calls the Virgin Mary the unique work of the Redemption, because amid all others she shines with so bright a light as to cast them all into shadow. She is like the sun whose name St. Isidore derives from its being the only one [*sol—solus*] among other luminaries, eclipsing them all with its splendor.

The Blessed Virgin, also, may be called the unique work of the Incarnation because of another reason which we should believe true. Even if the love of men in general had not sufficed to draw the Eternal Word from the bosom of the Father to this earth, He would have been moved to come for the sake of this creation of His—the Virgin Mary. Certainly, a greater blessing came to her from the merits of Christ than to all the rest of the predestined together. Who can say that Christ would have ill employed the labors of the Redemption, if He had applied them to the Virgin alone? Or that she, by herself alone, would not have been an object worthy of the Divine Redemption?

Last of all, the Blessed Virgin is a unique work of the Incarnation by the way in which she was redeemed. All other mortals were *re*-made—restored to newness of life. She alone was made from the beginning in this life of grace [not born in original sin, like others, and therefore to be *re*-generated in baptism or by a later grace; but created in the state of grace, in her Immaculate Conception].

And in this the great power of Christ's merits is shown far more perfectly; for they are shown to be a remedy for sin, not only by healing its wounds, but by preserving beforehand from all its evil.

It is the Virgin Mary—thus perfectly redeemed—who has been taken by Christ as His companion and helper in the Redemption of the world.

With this lofty title the Holy Fathers have commonly honored the Blessed Virgin. St. Irenæus [who was taught by the immediate disciples of St. John the Evangelist] calls her "the cause of salvation to mankind." St. Augustine says: "Eve was the source of sin to us, and Mary the source of merit." St. Jerome expressly declares that we have "life through Mary." In like manner [through the different ages] speak the Fathers and Doctors, St. Fulgentius, St. Peter Chrysologus, St. Bernard, St. Anselm, St. Peter Damian, Richard of St. Victor, and many others.*

This ought not to seem to us a title of mere honor; but we should understand how it was that the Blessed Virgin concurred in the work of our Redemption. It was in three different ways: first, by her desires, before the Incarnation of the Eternal Word; secondly, at the time of the Incarnation, by

* [On this point, Father Faber has written in English, *The Foot of the Cross;* also, see Mgr. de Concilio, *The Knowledge of Mary*, and the very valuable short work of Father Jeanjacquot, translated under the auspices of Cardinal Manning.]

the offering she made of her Divine Son; lastly, by the sufferings which she endured along with Him in His Passion.

First, the Blessed Virgin concurred in our Redemption by her desires. God, in His pity for our wretchedness, had promised us a Redeemer. But the centuries went by and He did not appear. Who, cried the Prophet, shall be the blessed soul that by her prayers shall make the Sun of Justice to rise on so long a night? *Who shall make the Just One to rise up from the East?* The undertaking was toilsome and hard; there was none to offer himself to the labor. But at last Mary the Virgin, like the Aurora, brought the Sun of Eternity to His dayspring in time. *It is I who have made the unfailing Light to rise up in the heavens.*[9] She soared so high on the wings of her desires and her merits that she reached even to the Throne of God, to hasten our Redemption and to receive worthily the Incarnate Word into her bosom.

Secondly, when the Redeemer was born, she further concurred in our Redemption by offering Him to death for our sake. For us she had borne Him, for us she brought Him up to maturity, and for us—along with the Eternal Father—she destined Him to the Cross. Who can understand it? It is the exclamation of St. Bernardine: "O wondrous condescension toward us of each of the Parents of Jesus! O the priceless love of the charity of God

[9] Isaias, xli. 2; Ecclesiasticus, xxiv. 6.

and the Virgin for us! That they might redeem the slave, they have delivered up their common Son!"

The son belongs by a peculiar right to his mother, according to all laws; and His Divinity did not exempt Christ from this dominion of His Mother over Him, for it is consistent with the highest and noblest nature. The same Divine Son would not take human flesh in her virginal womb and begin His life without her leave and express consent. It is not credible, therefore, that without her leave and express consent He would go forth to die upon the Cross.

What greater treasure could she offer for us than her Divine Child to die for our sake? "Of Mary also it is said that she *so loved the world as to give her Only-Begotten Son*," St. Bonaventure exclaims in reverent wonder.[10] If we consider the loving affection with which her offering is made, it is beyond our understanding. If we look upon the one that makes the offering, it is a creature that has none superior to herself save the Creator; and the victim she offers is the life of God. See if any other sacrifice could be more pleasing to the Eternal Father, excepting only the Sacrifice of the Cross.

Last of all, it was not alone by the offering of her Son to suffer that she concurred in the work of our Redemption. She also had part in it by the

[10] St. John, iii. 16.

offering of herself, together with all her incomprehensible Sorrows.

"Two altars are seen on Calvary," says a spiritual writer: "one in the Heart of Mary sorrowing, the other in the Body of Christ crucified. Christ offers up His Flesh; Mary offers up her soul."[11] And the offering of both is one and the same Divine Sacrifice.

This is the reason of the words said by the Blessed Virgin to St. Bridget: "As with a single Heart, My Son and I have redeemed the world." In strictness of terms, Christ had no need of help and Mary was not a redeemer, but redeemed. But such was the blessing she won for herself from the Redemption, and such the love and lawful right with which she took part in it to our great benefit, that she has deserved to be honored with this lofty title of Co-redemptress. This means that, in our behalf, she has united her merits with the divine merits of her Son; and by her prayers she has helped to obtain for us that which Christ has merited for us in strict justice, by living and dying for us.

Here we should remember how far our Saviour's condescension reaches toward the other Saints. Thus, in bestowing His graces on St. Gertrude, He promised her—"Even as I am *the Figure of the substance* of the Father in the Godhead, so shalt thou be to Me a figure of My substance in My Humanity."[12] This may help us to understand that

[11] Arnold Carnotensis. [12] Hebrews, i. 3.

far more express and living Image of the Heart of Christ which was formed in the Heart of Mary—by her virtues and her sorrows, and by the grace which she received in its fulness from the Redeemer.

III.

The first of the disciples of Christ.

CHRIST also formed the exact likeness of Himself in the soul of the Virgin Mary by His teachings as the Divine Master.

Jesus Christ did not come down from heaven only to redeem the world; He came also to instruct it. This He did, fully and perfectly, in two ways—by His example, and by His teaching. Yet how strange was the division of His life! To instruct the world He employed only three years. What was He doing the rest of the time? Why did He not travel over the entire earth, converting it with His miracles, sanctifying it with His virtues, filling it with the light of His divine words? Of the eleven parts of His life [thirty-three years], ten [or thirty years] were passed in the obscurity of a poor home. Are we to believe that His life there was idle and His conversation without fruit?

Certainly not, since He spent all those years in the greatest of all His works of grace—in forming His Mother's sanctity. For this was immeasurably

higher than the sanctity of all the elect, and the most like to the holiness of the Divine Master.

The pearl of great price is not fashioned in its shell unless far down in the depths of the sea. So the Redeemed long remained far from the world, and the priceless term of His divine labors was His Mother.

The Word made Flesh came down from heaven to open His school on earth. He was solemnly declared Master by the Eternal Father: *Hear ye Him.*[13] How contrary to all order would it have been, if He had not found one disciple to correspond fully with His heavenly lessons and thereby to render the honor due to His divine teaching? Yet such a disorder would have been seen in the world, had it not been for the Virgin Mary. She was chosen for a sanctity like to the holiness of the Deified Humanity of Jesus Christ. She fulfilled the divine choice, and she fully corresponded to the divine will in the determination taken by the Son of God to become Himself the Model and the Master of men.

She had every reason, therefore, to say—*My spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.*[14] God had come down to redeem her more especially than the rest of men. He had come as a Master to instruct her alone more than all the rest of the Church; and His teaching was given to her alone for a far longer time.

[13] St. Matthew, xvii. 5. [14] St. Luke, i. 47.

On her side, she gave greater honor to the Divine Master than all others. She comprehended His dignity; and its likeness was wrought out in her with so perfect holiness that she became a second Model, which under the law of grace was to be copied by Apostles and Martyrs, by Doctors and Confessors, by Virgins and all just souls.

Jesus Christ did not wish to be the Divine Master in word alone, but much more by His example. *He began to do, and to teach.*[15] To make perfect His holy Mother, He used both means. He taught her with His outer words, and showed before her—as in a clear glass—the inner workings of His Sacred Humanity and the heroic acts of every virtue that made up His life. It was in imitation of these that the Blessed Virgin formed her own actions; and this was the unique privilege of Mary—to know clearly the interior of her Divine Son in order to imitate it. For this reason, St. Eusebius of Emesa says: "Mary, filled with the Holy Ghost, knew the very thoughts of her Son."

In this, too, consisted the divine intercourse between the Son and His Mother. She had given Him the being of His Human Nature; and He in turn gave her the spiritual being of grace. Thus they became alike in perfection as they were like in their humanity. In this the Spouse of God found her pure and shining Model, to which she looked unceasingly, adorning herself with the precious

[15] Acts, i. 1.

jewels of the Móst Holy Soul of the Redeemer, copying them in herself so far as was possible to a pure creature.

Good example has such force that only the conversing for a day with the Fathers of the Desert was enough to change to another man one who had wandered thither for mere curiosity. This is the testimony of St. John Chrysostom. From it we may judge what must have been the power of the example of the Incarnate Word, so long observed, and of the teachings of the Divine Master, so often repeated, over a Heart so well disposed as that of Mary.

Christ worked unceasingly in His Mother with all the power of His love, and with all the strength of His mighty arm. He let no moment pass in which He added not grace to grace and gift to gift and blessing to blessing, inasmuch as she was at every moment making herself worthier and fitter to receive them. There is but one thing, therefore, to be said of His work. At the end He had formed so perfect an Image of Himself that it may be called—of form divine! And it is so called in the mystic writings attributed to St. Dionysius, the Areopagite, when writing to St. Paul of the great favor he had received at the hands of St. John who had introduced Him—"to the presence, as it were divine, of this great Virgin."

Something like this happens in that solar phe-

nomenon which is called "parhelion." The sun mirrors itself in a cloud capable of receiving its light, producing a brightness so like to itself that the eye can scarcely distinguish the reflection from the real sun. In this way the Heart of Christ, with example and instruction, so formed a living Image of Itself in the Heart of Mary, that her appearance is as that of Christ and the One is seen, as it were, in the other.

This is what the Blessed Virgin said to St. Bridget: "He that looks on me, can see in me as in a mirror the Divinity and the Humanity of Christ." For this the Divine Spouse in Scripture calls out to her: *Show unto Me thy face.*[16] "Why?" asks Theodoret, the early commentator; and he answers: "That in her, as in a mirror, He may see His own Divine countenance."

[16] Canticles, ii. 14.

CHAPTER V.

THE HEAVEN OF THE FIRE OF DIVINE LOVE.

[*This is that perpetual fire which shall never fail upon the altar.*—Leviticus, vi. 13.]

I.

The Blessed Virgin is loved by God more than all other creatures together.

In the system of the philosopher Aristotle, pure fire has the highest heaven for its own proper sphere. There it enjoys its full activity, for it is in its own element; whereas, in our lower sphere, its power is limited because it is in an element foreign to itself. This may serve to make us understand the difference between the charity which is in our earthly hearts and the charity which burns in the Heart of the Virgin Mary. For in this Immaculate Heart the fire of holy love is in its own sphere—far-reaching, pure, intense beyond measure.

Thus, from whatever point of view we look on the perfection of Mary, we find nothing there but pure love. She is loved by God more than all other creatures; she, more than all other creatures, loves

God; and she, after God, is the most worthy of the love of all creatures.

The Blessed Virgin is more loved by God than all other creatures taken together. For she is that *only one*—that *perfect one*—who goes far before the numberless multitude of all the other elect souls. *Of the maidens there is no number: one is My dove, My perfect one.*[1] For this reason it is said of her—*Who is she that cometh up from the desert, flowing with delights?* For the universe, full as it may be of Saints, in comparison with this Blessed Virgin appears before God as a desert solitude, wherein Mary alone attracts His sight.

The faithful witnesses of love are the gifts it makes. In the unique gifts of God to the Virgin Mary we may find the sure measure of the singular love borne her by the Most Holy Trinity.

In the first place, what is it that the Eternal Father has not given to Mary in giving her His Divine Son? He has thus made her to share in His own proper glory which He has not given, nor will He ever give it, to any other on earth or in heaven.

The highest glory of the Father is not that the creation of the world should be assigned to Him; for it adds nothing real to Him, and without it He has been happy for all eternity. That which is entirely and exclusively His own is that He generates a Son so perfect that, together with Himself, He is true God. This is why, in the Apostles' Creed, we

[1] Canticles, vi. 7, 8.

first acknowledge Him to be the Father—*I believe in God the Father Almighty*—and afterwards—*Creator of heaven and earth.*

Now this glory is so sublime that the Father does not even communicate it to either of the other two Divine Persons of the Trinity. Yet He would, as it were, share it with the Virgin Mary, since He has chosen to have God His Son in common with her; so that she—the Mother—is the source of the created being of Christ in time even as He—the Father—is the Origin of His uncreated being in eternity. And both can say to Him with all truth: *Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee.*[2]

This is so high a privilege that St. Bernardine says of it: "This dignity, which is beyond all thought, is found neither among created persons, nor among the uncreated Persons of the Divinity. It is found only in a single Divine Person—the Father—and in one human person—the Virgin Mother."

In like manner, what is it the Eternal Word has not given to His Mother in giving her this very privilege of choosing to be His Mother? Could not the Son of God work in the Blessed Virgin as her Lord? He waited not for the consent of Adam in order to form Eve; and so he might have formed Himself a Body in the virginal womb of Mary without demanding her good-pleasure, and much more without awaiting it.

[2] St. John, iii. 16.

Yes, He might have done so; but He would not. "He would not take His Flesh from her unless she gave It," says the Abbot William. To her will He referred the final working out of the greatest of all possible works—the Divine Incarnation. He allowed her to accept it in that form and under those conditions which it pleased her to impose. *Be it done to me according to thy word.*[2]

Thus all creatures were to be debtors to the Virgin Mary for their redemption; and, what is more, He Himself should owe to her His created being. And because of this she may glory—alone among all others—that she has first bestowed gifts on Him. This is the saying of St. Methodius, Martyr. who hails the great Mother of God with these beautiful words: "All hail to thee, who hast a claim on Him that has paid the ransom of all. For we are all God's debtors; but He is a debtor to thee!"

Last of all, what has not been given to Mary in making her the Spouse of the Holy Ghost? Human laws give to a spouse the titles of her consort; and with greater reason the laws of heaven make the Virgin Mary to share in the titles of the Divine Spouse.

But these Espousals of Paradise have not their priceless favors limited to a mere title. In the ancient time, it was the custom to give the bride at her entrance the key of the house, as a sign of the

[2] St. Luke, i. 38.

common ownership of goods to which the consort received her. Thus the Blessed Virgin Mary, espoused to the Holy Ghost, acquires new and unspeakable dominion over all the riches of grace and over the distribution of the treasures of heaven. This is explained by St. Bernardine: "She has, if I may say so, a certain jurisdiction over the going forth of the Holy Spirit in time. Thus every grace is administered by her hands, to whom she wishes, when she wishes, as she wishes and inasmuch as she wishes."

The privileges, therefore, which the Blessed Virgin has received from the Most Holy Trinity are immeasurably above those of all other creatures. Who then will refuse to accept the teaching of the greatest Doctors—that the Virgin Mary is more loved and has received greater favors and privileges than the whole Church, militant and triumphant together. This is the summing up of Suarez, quoting from the Fathers and Doctors of the Church: "God loves the Blessed Virgin alone more than all the other Saints."

Hence the Virgin Mary is that pearl of great price, in buying which alone Jesus Christ has thought the treasures of His Redemption better employed than in buying all the throng of lesser pearls, that is, the rest of the predestined. If, by an impossibility, either could be lost, He would rather preserve her by herself alone than all the immense multitude of Saints, than all the human race!

II.

The Blessed Virgin loves God more than all other creatures love Him.

In a clear crystal the rays of the sun that fall directly upon it are the measure of the rays reflected from it. So the immensity of God's love for the Virgin Mary gives us to know the intense strength of her answering charity. Between the one and the other there is as true a proportion as can be found between a pure creature and the Creator. *My Beloved is to me, and I to Him.*[4]

It would be unnatural and shocking that the Blessed Virgin should be loved more than all other creatures together, and should not give back love in return to God Who so loves her. "What wonder if she loves more than all, who more than all is beloved?" says St. Bonaventure. Yet who can speak worthily of it? The flame of fire cannot be painted as vivid as it is in reality by mere colors on the canvas, and less still with a dull pencil. But—to say something, even though lispingly—we will keep in mind that divine love in the Heart of Mary was as fire in its own heavenly sphere; and therefore it had these three qualities—it was intense, and never failing, and most pure.

It was altogether pure, because the Blessed Virgin—from the beginning of her existence—never

[4] Canticles, ii. 16.

properly loved anything else than God. If she loved creatures it was always because of God and in God, with perfect charity.

Besides, this fire never failed in the Heart of the Blessed Virgin, as upon the altar consecrated to the Lord. *The fire upon My altar shall be always burning.*[5] In the first moment of her life she received a sublime knowledge of the Divinity, and forthwith she turned toward God with all the power of her affections. And thus turned wholly to God she ever continued, without interruption even from sleep. For, as has been explained, her intellect did not depend entirely on the sensible impressions of the imagination for its knowledge; and even less dependent was the will in loving.

In the Island of Madeira, it is said, a conflagration was once kindled that burned on for seven years, nor could it be quenched so long as fuel for its flames was still remaining. But in the Virgin Mary the flame of charity burned on, not for seven, but for more than sixty years, until that blessed fire had quite consumed her mortal existence. And then—like a Phenix of Paradise which, dead, rises again from its funeral pyre—she soared at once from love in this pilgrimage of earth to love in the Fatherland of heaven. For numberless acts of charity had made up the full days of her mortal life.

Thus the theologian Suarez remarks: "The acts of charity which the Blessed Virgin elicited in this

[5] Leviticus, vi. 12.

life were so innumerable that their multitude may be compared with that of all the other Saints; for she was continually meriting."

But far above every other character of the love of Mary was its intensity. On the one hand, this sacred flame met with no hindrance; for the Blessed Virgin was without sin, and guilty of no negligence, and open to no imperfection. On the other hand, she was full of the sublimest wisdom, from infused faith and hope and the gifts of the Holy Ghost. Frequent, also, were her visions of the Divine Being, Which more than once she contemplated in open sight as do the Blessed. Hence she was all on fire with divine love, according to the comparison of St. Ildephonsus: "As fire heats iron, so did the Holy Ghost enkindle and inflame her that she seemed the very flame of that Holy Spirit; nor was anything to be seen in her except the fire of God's love."

Meanwhile, the Holy Ghost wrought in her as He would; and He willed to work as great things in her as a created being could receive, according to the laws laid down for His grace. Not only did she alone love God more than all the other Saints together; in her exceeding charity, she so satisfied that obligation we are under of loving Him, that her love alone was as great as that which He could rightly demand of us all.

To the Blessed Virgin, therefore, we may reasonably apply the words of our Lord in promulgating

His law from the flames of Sinai: *In His right hand was the fiery law. . . . Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind and with all thy strength.*[6] What other mortal could comply with such a command in its fulness? Mary fulfilled it well—more perfectly even, while yet a wayfarer on this earth, than do those who have reached their journey's end in heaven.

Rightly, then, is she called—*Mother of fair love.*[7] In her heart she brought forth love so perfect that no other created intelligences have known its like. She brought down Divine Love Itself from heaven to earth, obliging—so far as was possible—the Eternal Father to give her His Only-Begotten Son. For, had the Virgin Mary loved our Lord less, there would not have been found on earth that disposition which was required for the coming down of the Eternal Word to be made Man.

Holy Doctors declare that the Body of Jesus Christ was formed at the beginning from the most pure blood of that virginal Heart, sent forth with intense affection when she gave Redemption to the world by her words of consent. FIAT—*Be it done to me according to thy word!*

What better beginning could there be for the Eternal Love Incarnate than the Heart of Mary? And what worthier Heart is there, after the Heart of

[6] Deuteronomy, xxxiii. 2, vi.-5; St. Mark, xii. 30.

[7] Ecclesiasticus, xxiv. 24.

her Divine Son, than the Heart of that Mother who would not be a Mother except by divine love?

III.

The Blessed Virgin is worthy of love above all other creatures.

THE Virgin Mary is loved by God above all other creatures. She loves God in return more than do all other creatures. It necessarily follows that she is likewise worthy of love above all other creatures.

All good has a twofold worthiness of love—as it is in itself, and inasmuch as it is good for us.

Now the Blessed Virgin is in every way most worthy of love; and first, because of the perfections with which she is endowed in herself. In her are all perfections, in their highest degree and in their fullest extent. *In the fulness of the Saints is my dwelling-place.*[8] That is to say, according to St. Bonaventure's exposition: "I have in its fulness all that the other Saints have in part." With all the fulness of which a creature is capable, according to the laws of grace, the Blessed Virgin holds the united possession of all those fair gifts which are scattered separately among the other Saints.

If we would speak of the order of nature, St. Bernard says—"For her the whole world was made."

[8] Ecclesiasticus, xxiv. 16.

And he adds: "God created Mary as a special world for Himself." Her creation was to show forth the glory of the Creator immeasurably more than all the rest of the universe can manifest it.

Her mind was as the day of heaven, which has no night. She was enlightened with all manner of knowledge, not only that which is acquired and belongs to human experience, but especially that which is infused by the Holy Ghost. Her knowledge of natural and supernatural truth was deeper and completer than that of any created mind before or after. No ignorance or error ever rose up to bewilder her, nor was there ever wanting any knowledge fitting to her station as Mother of God, Queen of the Angels, and Universal Advocate of the Church.

This is why her mind never wearied, since its working was not with the sensible images necessary to us, but with divinely infused ideas such as the Angels have. This too is why her contemplation of divine things went on, as has been said, even during her sleep; for it did not depend on the activity of the senses.

Her body also shared in the gifts of her soul. In the letter to St. Paul, attributed to St. Dionysius the Areopagite and already quoted, he speaks of his first look upon that face of Paradise. He remained as one in ecstasy; and he says [he had been recently converted by the Apostle from the Greek idolatry]: "Unless divine faith had taught me that this was not God, I should have venerated her as a goddess."

"The beauty of the Mother of God," adds Albertus Magnus, "reached the highest degree to which the work of nature can attain in the human body."

A contemplative Carthusian monk says it was necessary she should have the power of tempering the glory of her countenance, that those who looked on her might bear its splendor. But here exchange was made for the more powerful attractions to virtue, so that the only sight of her stirred the beholder to purity. It was formerly said that many centuries of the sun's shining were needed to produce gold in the bosom of the mountains. With a single glance the Blessed Virgin can bring holiness into the hearts of men.

All this was the perfection of Mary in the gifts of nature alone. But from this it is easy to gather what must have been the perfection of her soul in heavenly gifts.

In her alone the labors of the Incarnate Word had their full and perfect work. From the beginning she was made ready—by every grace and by all the gifts of heaven—to be the worthy companion of Jesus Christ, His helper in the Redemption, a true Mother of God, between whom and God there should be that fit proportion which was needed by her for generating in time Him Whom the Eternal Father generates from all eternity.

This is what has already been quoted from St. Bernardine: "That a woman should conceive and bring forth God, it is necessary that she should be

uplifted to a certain equality with God, as it were by an infinity of graces and gifts, and so become like God." Hence the sublime titles which the Holy Doctors, moved by the Spirit of God, unite in bestowing on the Virgin Mary. . . . . Hence their loving strife in extolling her to the heights of praise. And in this they have shown us the way of truth, in which we may not err; since they are given us as our guides by our Lord.

Yet our highest conception from all they tell us is but a rude outline of the real greatness of Mary and of the beauty of her blessed soul. The Divine Spouse Himself is so filled with admiration of her majesty that He wearies not of calling her the beautiful one. *Behold thou art beautiful, My beloved, behold thou art beautiful! . . How beautiful art thou, My beloved, how beautiful art thou! . . . . How beautiful art thou and how seemly, O My best beloved!* [9]

Ah, what a heavenly sight shall greet our eyes if we are worthy to see one day Mary on the throne of her glory! St. Catharine of Sienna was once given to see the beauty of a soul in the state of grace. She was so amazed at the sight that, in her ecstasy, she said to our Lord Jesus Christ: "I do not wonder that Thou shouldst have given Thy divine life to buy pearls of so great price!" What would she not have said if it had been given her to cast a look on that creation of endless beauty, the Virgin Mary,

[9] Canticles, i. 14, iv. 1, vii. 6.

who has in herself alone the beauty of all the heavenly Paradise—*seemly as Jerusalem!*[10]

Even had all this measureless perfection remained shut up in the bosom of the Blessed Virgin—even had she been good only in herself alone—she would still justly merit the love and good will of every heart. But she is also like the moon, which is never full for itself alone but turns to mortals below all the blessing of its fulness. "She is *full of grace* for herself and for others."

She shares in the Uncreated Light; but there is no ray or influence from It which she does not reflect down upon us in our wretchedness. She holds herself equally blessed in that which she receives and in that which she can give forth to our earth as the Mother of Mercy.

But we must not let words of such comfort to ourselves pass us by without mature consideration. The Blessed Virgin has need of three things for fulfilling the office given her by our Lord—that of Mother of Pity and Universal Advocate of all the Holy Church. These are knowledge, power, and good will to act in our behalf. All three are found in her with all due perfection.

Human laws have not admitted women to exercise the office of advocate, perhaps because distrust was felt of their knowledge and ability. But the tribunal of Heaven might well confide in the knowledge and ability of the Blessed Virgin.

[10] Canticles, vi. 3.

She dwells far within the Light of God, she is *clothed with the Sun*,[11] whereby she may see in God all our needs. Her power shares in God's omnipotence. "God has so exalted Mary that He has made all things possible to her," says St. Anselm. Her kingdom reaches to the limits of created things. "As many creatures as serve the Trinity, serve also the Blessed Virgin," says St. Bernardine.

Now this vast dominion is not held by her for the sole reason that she has been chosen out for it. She has it also by a natural right. As Mother she should share in the possessions of her Divine Son. As Spouse of the Most High she should share in all the riches of her Divine Spouse. As perfect above all others, she should be honored by all created persons. "Even were she not God's Mother," says St. Bernardine, "she ought none the less to be Queen of the Universe because of her perfection."

But what shall we say of her good will toward us? For in this, too, she is like the lily: the weight of the crown upon her head only serves to bend it more kindly toward the earth. All her gifts and graces are looked upon by her as so many reasons for doing good to us. Beyond belief is the love she bears to the souls redeemed by her Divine Son; for she looks on them as won by His great victory. She esteems them in the measure of the price which He has paid for their ransom.

All the souls of the Blessed are filled with love for

[11] Apocalypse, xii. 1.

each other. Yet, St. Bernardine remarks, their love in comparison with the charity of the Blessed Virgin for each one of them, is only like a point of earth in comparison with the vast circle of the heavens.*

Thus the Blessed Virgin loves all Christians with an exceeding love. How unnatural would be their ingratitude, if they were not to dispose their hearts to love in return one so loving toward us!

The Holy Angels have less reason to love Mary their Queen than we. Yet from the time of their creation, when she was shown to them in the designs of God clothed with the Divine Light, they have loved her more than themselves.† Why should not we also love her in like manner, since we are far more bound to her love? Among created beings she is the most wondrous, high uplifted above all others, and joined in closest union with the Incarnate God. It is in the order of charity that we should love her more than ourselves.

* [The passage here referred to by the author has a different meaning from that assigned by him, but equally to the purpose. The Saint says, in effect, that the Blessed Virgin, who gave being to the Incarnate Love of God, is as the source from which this love flows out to the furthest circle of heaven. That is, she is the *Mother of Divine Grace.*]

† [The author here refers to the revelations of Blessed Amedeus; but the great truth pointed out—namely, God's unfolding of the plan of man's Redemption to the Angels—is quoted by St. Paul from the prophecy of David, speaking of the Son of God becoming Man.—*Hebrews, i.* 6; *Psalm xcvi.* 7.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SEA OF GREAT SORROWS.

[*For great, like the sea, is thy heart-breaking.*—Lamentations, ii. 13.]

I.

The Blessed Virgin's fortitude in suffering.

THE consideration of the exceeding sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary should produce in us true compassion. It is only just that we who love her should suffer along with her.

These sorrows were as a great flood wherein her Heart was sunk in the full tide of grief and pain, so that its like has not been seen on earth in the heart of any creature. *Behold, and see if there is sorrow like unto my sorrow.*[1]

The Flood of old had three sources of its great waters—earth and sea and sky. The flood of grief in the Heart of Mary had also its threefold source of great sorrows—in the Blessed Virgin herself, in men, and in our Lord Jesus Christ. In the Blessed Virgin it was her own fortitude; in men, their ingratitude; in Jesus Christ, the love which His

[1] Lamentations, i. 12.

Mother had for Him. In the Flood that was to overflow the earth, all the waters that are in the earth's own bosom rose up from their depths to flow forth in torrents. So the first source of the great sorrows that overwhelmed the Virgin issued forth from the blessed earth of her own Immaculate Heart.

We must bear in mind that she is that *Valiant Woman* whose price is not found in our land. For *who shall find the valiant woman? From afar—from the uttermost bounds—is the price of her.*[2] She is the only one that is truly strong, for she has never been conquered by sin nor ever been under the power of the evil one—never subject to any other than God alone. *Her price is from afar—from the uttermost bounds* of God's universe—since it was especially to buy her that the Eternal Word came down from heaven. On her He spent more of His graces, His merits, His Redemption, than He employed in the ransom of all the other Saints and all the elect.

It was fitting that this Valiant Woman should be given the opportunity of showing forth the strength of her unconquerable Heart; and this was done on Calvary. There God her Son bore patiently the burden of sorrows which only a God could suffer. There likewise the Heart of Mary received weight of grief measured only by the strong virtue of the first and greatest of all pure creatures. Thus, even

[2] Proverbs, xxxi. 10.

in suffering, she became the living image of her Divine Son.

In suffering, indeed, God could open wide His hand toward her; for her sorrows were at once a pain and a welcome boon to her. Sufferings have been ennobled by Jesus Christ crucified; and hence they are become precious to all holy souls. They look on suffering as the richest dower of their espousals with our Lord.

St. Peter declares it: *This is grace, if anyone endure sorrows because of God.*[3] Blessed Angela called sufferings her choicest blessings. St. Teresa thought life was a good for this only reason, often saying over to herself—"To die, or to suffer!" And St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi went still further, saying that it was better to go on in a life of sufferings for our Lord than to come to its end without this advantage of suffering; and so she prayed—"Lord, to suffer, and not to die!"

We may know what must have been the desire of suffering in the Heart of the Virgin Queen of all virtues, from these burning desires of holy souls. For as far as she soared above all the elect in sanctity, so far did her desires exceed theirs to suffer great things for God.

We may penetrate the truth of this yet further, by considering how the Saints have found in suffering two reasons for loving it. One is that sufferings are so many means of becoming like to Jesus Christ

[3] I. St. Peter, ii. 19.

in His virtues; the other, that they are means of becoming like to Him in His glory. Now the likeness between the Mother of God and her Divine Son was exceeding great, and great is the glory which is her reward. Great then must have been the sufferings which were means to this likeness and glory.

It is not for us, however, to measure their greatness. *Who hath measured the height of the heavens and the greatness of the earth and the depth of the sea?*[4] The Creator may take the measure of these things, but no other.

To all this must be added that the fulness of this sea of sorrows was proportioned not alone to the virtues of Mary and the glory awaiting her in heaven. Sorrow had also to be measured out to her according to the honor due her Son here on earth. It was not right that God should suffer and that there should be no worthy compassion upon His sufferings.

Who was capable of compassion thus worthy of Him? The Angels in heaven could adore Him and stand in wonder and praise; but they could not suffer in compassion. Men on earth had no compassion, but inflicted and multiplied His torments. It was not enough that insensible creatures—the earth and the elements, the sun and the heavens—should give signs of grief at the Passion and Death of their Creator. Hence Providence chose out the Heart

[4] Ecclesiasticus, i. 2.

of Mary, pouring forth therein as great sorrow as would rightly compassionate the bitter suffering of the Man-God.

At the Annunciation by the Angel, the Virgin Mary—in the stead of all men—gave her consent to the union of the Eternal Word with our human nature. In like manner—in the stead of all men—she suffered with the Incarnate God in her Compassion on Calvary.

It was then that great natural wonder took place, which had never been seen in the world nor shall ever be seen again—the eclipsing of sun and moon together. Then, too, Christ—the true Sun—passed through the deep darkness of His Passion in suffering unknown to all others. And there the Blessed Virgin—as the Moon—stood overshadowed with darkest sorrow, in that Compassion which it has been given to no other heart to experience. It was the fulfilment of the prophecy: *The Sun shall be turned into darkness, and the Moon into blood.*[5]

II.

The answering ingratitude of men.

THE second source of the waters of the great Flood was the sea. It went forth from its former

[5] Joel, ii. 31.

bounds, and thus greatly helped to overwhelm the earth with its waters. This overflowing of the sea was represented in the Heart of Mary by the ingratitude of men. This helped to make up the flood of her great sorrows by multiplying all their pain.

Blood burst forth from all the veins of our Redeemer in His Prayer in the Garden of Gethsemani. But it was not the fear of death in the lower faculties of His soul that was the chief cause of this. It was due far more to a sorrow, more intense beyond measure, in the superior part of His soul. There He foresaw the loss of souls without number, who instead of profiting by this ransom of great price—the life of their God—would only gain from it, in their condemnation, a weighter sentence and more grievous punishment.

This is why Christ did not say that He was filled with sorrow "because" of death, but "unto" death: *My soul is sorrowful even unto death.*[6] Many years He had longed for the time when He should take upon Himself pain and ignominy and the Cross, for love of us. His natural fear of the loss of life could not then have been so grievous a burden as to send forth blood from every pore, unless its weight had been added to by an interior agony far greater.

This was that He should die for those who would be ungrateful. In vain should He consume His strength for their sake. He would not gain their salvation, which was the end preferred by

[6] St. Matthew, xxvi. 38; St. Mark, xiv. 34.

Christ to His own life. Therefore, many centuries before, He had complained by the mouth of the Prophet: *And I have said—I have labored in vain; without cause and idly have I consumed My strength.* [7]

The Sorrows of Mary were the living expression of the sufferings of Jesus. They were not on the surface alone, as objects imaged in a mirror, but stamped deep down in her Heart. Hence, even here, her Compassion faithfully reflected the Passion of Christ.

What lightening of her sorrows would it not have been to His Blessed Mother, to know that her Son's Blood would bear so universal fruit that no soul should perish! And on the other hand, how great her grief at seeing how few among so many He had redeemed, would accept their salvation!

A mother that is in labor heeds not the pain of her travail, for hope of offspring; but when, instead of the living child, a babe dead before its birth is brought forth, her torments begin where they should have ended. Such was the suffering of Jesus Christ, and such the sorrow of Mary. It was not so much the pain that weighed down upon them, as the sight of man's ingratitude, which should despise, and his injury to his own soul, which should trample under foot, that Precious Blood shed with such love and torment for the good of all.

The seraphic soul of St. Catharine of Sienna

[7] Isaias, xlix. 4.

was so tortured by the loss of souls, that she desired to lay herself across the very mouth of hell that none might enter there. But the torture of the Heart of Mary was from an immeasurably greater zeal for the good of souls, brought down to eternal loss by their own wickedness in the face of so plentiful Redemption.

Only the Son of God, and after Him His Blessed Mother, could weigh aright these two burdens of grief—that God should die upon the Cross to close the entrance to hell, and that numberless sinners should still cast themselves headlong into its everlasting flames.

This too was one cause, among others, why the Compassion of the Blessed Virgin so far exceeded the torments of the Martyrs. It surpassed them beyond compassion in that which was subjected to suffering, and in the instruments and qualities of the pain.

The Martyrs suffered only in their bodies, which they already hated as the enemy of their salvation. Mary also suffered in her body, though she could not justly hate it; for it had never been the enemy of the soul, but its most pure companion. But at the same time she suffered in her *soul pierced through with the sword* of grief;[8] and this sorrow was so much the keener as the spirit is more sensitive in itself than in the flesh.

The instruments of the Martyrs' torture were

[8] St. Luke, ii. 35.

wild beasts, flames, scourges, the pit, the sword, and the like. But in the Virgin Mary the instrument of pain was a Crucified God—the Divine Passion of her Son Jesus Christ. It is plain that this was a cause of grief immeasurably more powerful than all creatures together.

As to the quality of their torments, the pains of the Martyrs were sometimes miraculously softened, so that even the body scarcely felt them. Even when the body suffered, their hearts were so comforted by grace from heaven that the Martyrs were at once in suffering and in joy. But pain in the Blessed Virgin was pure suffering, so that she also might complain lovingly with her Son, to Whom she was made like: *My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?*[9] For in that time of her Compassion no comforting grace was given her to soothe the sorrows of her Heart.

It is also to our purpose to remember that the Blessed Virgin surpassed the Martyrs in another part of her sufferings. They gained the end at which they aimed in undergoing their torments, and that perfectly. Mary did not thus perfectly gain the end of her sufferings. The Martyrs endured death to bear witness to the truths taught them by faith and to gain the reward promised them by hope; and they attained this twofold end in its fulness. But the Blessed Virgin, in her suffering, was like her Son. With Him she endured, that she might gain

[9] St. Matthew, xxvii. 46; St. Mark, xv. 34.

the salvation of all; but He did not obtain the salvation of all, for great is the multitude of souls that are lost.

Rightfully, therefore, is she called the Queen of Martyrs. For she was more than Martyr—as far surpassing all the Martyrs in her suffering as she surpassed them by her virtues. "All the cruelty inflicted on the bodies of the Martyrs was light—or rather as nothing—in comparison with thy Sorrows, O Virgin," says St. Anselm. And the sorrows of the Saints become of little weight when placed alongside of the Heart of Mary.

See, then, how much we have cost the Blessed Mother of God. Behold the Sorrows she has undergone at the foot of the Cross, to bring us forth to the life of grace. And see, likewise, that the measure of the love and reverence and gratitude we owe her is to be found in corresponding with our great happiness of being her sons. *Thou shalt have honor for thy Mother: for thou oughtest to remember how many and how great things she has suffered for thee.*[10] Even the demons, were they capable of receiving the blessings she has obtained for us, would be grateful; and shall not we be bound by gratitude?

[10] Tobias, iv. 3, 4.

III.

The Virgin's compassionate love for Christ.

All the waters that came forth from the bosom of the earth and all the waves that rose up from the sea were not enough to drown the world. It was necessary that the flood-gates of heaven should be opened and rain down in torrents the waters stored up there from the beginning.

In like manner, to quite overwhelm the Heart of Mary in a sea of great sorrows, the torments which tried the fortitude of her soul were not enough; nor yet those which came from the ingratitude of the men for whose redemption Christ was dying. It was necessary that the Sacred Heart of Jesus, as from a high heaven, should pour forth the flood-tides of His own Passion into the Immaculate Heart of His Mother. The truest measure, therefore, of the Sorrows of Mary is the love she bore her Divine Son. There was no bitterer grief than the Mother's, because there was no Son dearer.

Our Lord had for His Blessed Mother a threefold love—natural, and acquired, and supernatural love.

He loved her naturally because she was His mother, and because she was the most perfect of all creatures, and because to her He owed the highest of all created good—His life. This love went on increasing day by day during the long time He

dwelt with His Virgin Mother, and experienced her constant care in serving and pleasing Him in all things.

But greater still beyond measure was Christ's supernatural love, wherewith Mary alone was dearer to Him than all the rest of His elect. Yet the love which Jesus Christ has for every holy soul is greater beyond all comparison than that which all the Saints have for Him. How incomprehensible then is the charity with which He loves His Blessed Mother, since He loves her more than He loves the whole Church, militant and triumphant together!

We cannot reach to understand it, says St. Anselm: "Think you there is any mind of man that can enter into that manner of love which God had for this Blessed Virgin? Can any man or Angel grasp in thought the immensity of this love, or find anything with which to compare it?"

Now to these three kinds of love the Blessed Virgin gave back answering love for her Divine Son.

First, she loved Him naturally as His Mother; but who can tell how much intenser love was hers than that of any other mother? The love of other mothers toward their children is often cooled for one reason or another. Sometimes it is because they have more than one child, and their good will being divided becomes less for each one of their offspring in particular. Sometimes it is because their children are ungrateful, or disobedient, or deformed. On the

other hand, their love in its excess sometimes becomes a vice.

But nothing of all this could detract from Mary's ardent love for Jesus. She was sure never to exceed in loving Him; and, on the other hand, never was Son fairer, and more like to his Mother, wiser and holier and more obedient than Jesus Christ. By Himself alone He was of greater worth than innumerable children; and all these motives for loving Him were sunk deep in the Heart of Mary. Who then can tell the answering love which she gave back to her Beloved Son?

Moreover, she lived long together with Him, and listened attentively to His divine words. They spent much time in loving conversation; and she found Him ever the *All Desirable One.*[11] And ever her own desire of pleasing Him flamed forth more ardently, kindling with new heat the fire of her charity.

Yet all this love—springing from nature and grown through constant use—was but a spark in comparison with the great conflagration enkindled in the Heart of Mary by her supernatural charity towards Jesus. She was His best beloved above all other creatures; and so, above all other creatures, she gave back love to her Divine Son. This is so true that St. Bernardine says—"There was such love for her Son in the Virgin Mother that, had it been possible,

[11] Canticles, v. 16.

she would have given herself up to death for Him an infinite number of times!"

Now, sorrow is great as love. And it was meet that she whose love was greater than that of all other creatures should suffer greater sorrow than all other creatures.

A special reason for this is that Mary's love was not a mere tender affection. It was a high esteem by which, with an inner light incomprehensible to our minds, she knew the priceless worth of her Son—the infinite riches of His Divinity, the virtues beyond compare of His Humanity, His true dignity as Head of men and Angels, Judge of the living and the dead, Who holds within His hands the Omnipotence of working miracles as He thinks best and the Lordship over all creatures to dispose of them as He wills.

She saw Him at once deserving of all reverence and every joy, and full of ignominy and pain. It is not enough to say simply that she suffered *with* her Son. She suffered *in* her Son, and this far more than in herself. She would gladly have chosen to take upon herself all His Passion, if she could but have lightened the grief of the Redeemer.

In the revelations made to St. Bridget, she says: "When my Son was born from me, I felt that half my heart, as it were, had birth and was gone forth from me." Thus we may represent Mary as suffering in each half of her one Heart—in her Son and in herself. But she suffered more in that portion

of her Heart which had gone forth from her, that is, in Christ, than in that which was still herself.

"So great was the Virgin's grief," says St. Bernardine, "that if it should be shared among all other creatures, all might at once die of it." This is not at all beyond belief. For interior sorrow comes from knowledge of some evil; and Mary's knowledge of the dignity of her Divine Son and of the evils He was suffering was far beyond the knowledge and apprehension of all men. It was even so far in excess of all their causes of grief that it would, of itself, be able to give each man his death.

It was not God's will that the lamb should be sacrificed along with its mother.[12] But He had dispensed with this law on Calvary. There, in one common Sacrifice, are offered up the Blessed Mother and her Divine Son. A spiritual writer of the Middle Ages says: "Both here offer a single holocaust—Mary in her Heart's blood, and Christ in the Precious Blood of His body."[13] And shall not we mingle at least our tears in this Sacrifice?

O thou Mother, Fount of love,
That thy sorrow I may prove
Make me feel thy strength of pain:
Make my heart with thine to accord
In burning love of Christ the Lord,
That His favor I may gain.

Hymn, *Stabat Mater.*

[12] Leviticus, xxii. 28. [13] Arnold Carnotensis.

CHAPTER VII.

GOD'S PARADISE OF DELIGHTS.

[*The Lord God planted a Paradise of delights from the beginning.*—Genesis, ii. 8.]

I.

The virtues of the Blessed Virgin.

From the beginning God made on earth a garden of delights for man—the earthly Paradise. So too He has formed a Paradise of delights for Himself—in the Heart of Mary.

Three things went to make up the delights of that first Paradise: the earth with its fruits, the serenity of the heavens, and the fountain of its waters. These are figures of three things which unite in the Heart of the Blessed Virgin to make it the pleasant abiding-place of God: namely, her virtues, her wisdom, and the gratitude of her Divine Son toward her.

First are the virtues of the Virgin Mary. To understand them, we must have some knowledge of their beginning and source, of their growth and upward course, and of the end which they attained.

The beginning and source of the virtues of

Mary was the magnificence of the Lord, Who with His own hand planted this garden of His delights. This is why these words are applied to her: *The Lord God planted a Paradise of delights from the beginning.*

In the first instant of her most blessed and Immaculate Conception, the Lord began working in that ground of natural virtue which—in her—was a nature wholly inclined to well-doing. Therein He placed all those supernatural virtues which are infused by the Holy Ghost, both theological [faith, hope, and charity] and moral [prudence, fortitude, justice, temperance, and their branches, such as religion, humility, and the others]. These were there in so heroic degree that each attained to its final perfection; and it could be said of none that there was something wanting. Hence, after her Son, the Virgin Mary is the divinest work presented to the contemplation of the Blessed in heaven.

From this lofty height the Blessed Virgin began her upward course; and her progress answered to her beginning. By her free co-operation she joined the acquired virtues to those infused by the Holy Ghost, working in so wondrous a way that anyone of her acts might surpass the perfection and merit of all the Saints in that line of virtue.

Thus St. Bernardine considers the humility and obedience, with which Mary gave her consent to the Divine Incarnation, to have been of greater merit to her than were all their torments to all the Martyrs.

For by this consent the Blessed Virgin merited to become the Mother of God—something which all the Martyrs together could not have merited. From this single act of virtue, reaching to so sublime a height, we may reason to the priceless worth of the innumerable acts that made up her life.

All the works of Mary were in full correspondence with the impulses of the Holy Spirit, and all answered fully to the strength of divine grace given to aid her.

The first of the Angels, in the few moments in which he worked in this manner, became as a Sun among the other blessed spirits. To what depths of light did not the Virgin Mary reach in a life so long, with so intense working of her spirit, in a series of actions which were without interruption from sleep and without let or hindrance to delay or turn them back in their onward course!

Hence the marvel of those blessed spirits, saying: *Who is she that cometh up from the desert, flowing with delights? . . Who is she that goeth forth as the rising dawn?*[1] And their wonder is not the offspring of ignorance, of which those blessed minds are incapable; but it springs from the grandeur of the sight they contemplate. From the dread desert of earth there rises up this great Virgin in grace so sublime that she gives forth her delights to God her Beloved with greater plenty and loftier merit than

[1] Canticles, viii. 5, vi. 9.

all that blessed multitude of Angels and Saints in heaven.

She was greater than them all in merit, because the virtues of Mary were like to the trees planted in the earthly Paradise, giving forth flowers and fruits together. In this way they shared in the high qualities of both heaven and earth. "In their perfection they belonged to the state of the Blessed in heaven; in merit they were of those who are still wayfarers on earth." Such is the teaching of Albertus Magnus.

The commonest plants take on an air of elegance in the gardens of princes, under the hand of skilful culture. So the least and commonest acts of the Virgin Mary differed in their perfection from the highest acts of the other Saints. There is no lower natural act than the taking of food. But the Blessed Virgin knew that her food was to serve to the nourishment of the Incarnate Word; and she mingled with her eating acts of virtue that amazed the very Seraphim.

Amazement ceases, however, when we remember God's end in the creation of Mary. In her He would form for us a Model of every virtue, as St. Thomas teaches. And for Himself He would form the place of His rest, whereto He might withdraw and, as it were, renew Himself in patience wearied out by the sins of men. *He Who created me hath rested in my tabernacle.*[2]

We can understand how perfect must have been

[2] Ecclesiasticus, xxiv. 12.

those virtues which were to give us a created image of all sanctity, and to form the delights of this retreat of Christ from the sins of the world. They must have been shown forth in numberless acts that were sublime beyond example and pure without flaw —acts worthy of her who was to conceive and bring forth, to nourish and guide and command the Incarnate Word.

If we have the mind to weigh aright all these motives, we shall come to know the true worth of the virtues of Mary. A maidenly heart was once so pleasing a resting-place to the Divine Spouse that He said of it—"You shall find Me in the heart of Gertrude." This was the great St. Gertrude. Who then shall fully understand that rest which the Divine Son found in the Heart of His Virgin Mother? She alone who gave Him that resting-place.

II.

The wisdom of the Blessed Virgin.

THE unchanging serenity of the heavens added greatly to the delights of the earthly Paradise. That garden of delights needed not the rain, and no cloud came to darken its light. This privilege of so blessed a place is but a figure to us of the Heart of Mary, in the wisdom imparted to her from the beginning by

the Holy Ghost. So high was this wisdom that, by means of it, she dwelt always in the light of a clear faith or a sublime vision of divine things.

Because of her faith she was declared *blessed* by St. Elizabeth. *Blessed art thou who hast believed; for those things shall be accomplished in thee, which have been spoken to thee by the Lord.*[3]

The faith of the Virgin Mary is to be measured by the blessedness of her lot. By her faith she came into possession of that Good which is higher than all thought; and beyond all our thought must have been the faith which brought her to it. Faith must have been in her in the highest degree possible to a creature, and thus she is the first and chief of all believers. She has reached, so to speak, the very ideal of this virtue. She has made amends for all the failings of the faithful in their belief; and she atones for all infidels who are never to believe. If she alone of all men had believed, the divine light of faith would have been well spent. The light of faith which was in her might have been shared with all men; and it would suffice to enlighten the minds of as many as have been, are, and shall be to the end of time.

The splendor of this light suffered no change in the Paradise of the Virgin, excepting only when it opened out to more perfect brightness and a clearer day in the high visions which she enjoyed.

It would be more than extreme rashness to deny that the mind of the Blessed Virgin was enlightened

[3] St. Luke, i. 45.

by every heavenly vision. This is the means of which our Lord has commonly availed Himself for sanctifying His chosen souls. It would not be fitting that He should reject it in the sanctification of the Tabernacle which, by its holiness, was to give Him so pleasing an abode. *The Most High hath sanctified His Tabernacle.*[4] To the purest of the Virgin Saints their Divine Spouse has often shown this familiarity. We cannot suppose that He would deny it to the Mother of holy love.

Hence two kinds of visions would more especially be granted to the Virgin Mary. One was frequent—the showing her of the Divine Essence by the means of sublime ideas infused into her mind, wherein as in a clear crystal she daily discerned more and more the fulness of God's attributes.

The other was rarer, but by so much the more sublime. It was the sight of the Divine Essence without veil, so that—while still a wayfarer on earth—she might enjoy that which is the everlasting happiness of the Blessed in the Fatherland of heaven.

St. Augustine and St. Thomas say that this was the sight of the Divinity—face to face—which was granted to Moses and St. Paul; and it certainly should not be denied to the Blessed Virgin. This follows St. Bernard's rule in such things: "When something has been granted even to a few mortals, it is certainly not right to suppose that it has been refused to so blessed a Virgin."

[4] Psalm xlv. 5.

That Moses and the Apostle, while still in mortal flesh, saw the Divinity absolutely without veil, might be doubted without this being a reason for doubting Its vision by Mary. *Man shall not look on Me, and live*, were God's words to Moses.[5] But the Blessed Virgin was not ruled by Providence according to Its common laws for men, but with due relation to her immeasurable dignity as Mother of God. "If God could give Himself to be thus seen," says Gerson, "it was but just that He should grant it to His Mother."

Beyond all explanation would be the effects remaining from such visions in the Heart of Mary. The slenderest ray of that Uncreated Light, manifested to other Saints in the mirror of created things, raised them above themselves, filled them with unaccountable sweetness, transformed them into beings quite different from their former selves. If the Lord had not tempered this influence of His Divine Light, the Saints could not have borne up under it, as we see in the life of St. Teresa.

Yet this Divine Sun, in Itself and without veil or cloud, clothed round about with the deepest of Its splendors the Heart of Mary. Therein It met with no hindrance from lukewarmness, or failing, from heedlessness or ingratitude or forgetfulness. There was every perfect disposition of the highest grace and love, and the offering of all to God's

[5] Exodus, xxxiii.

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

lieving Him, all sight in knowing Him, all charity in loving Him, all virtue in working for Him."

III.

The gratitude of Jesus Christ to the Virgin Mary.

THE delights of the earthly Paradise were largely due to the fountain which watered that blissful spot. It was designed to keep trees and fruits in their everlasting beauty. So in the Paradise of the Heart of Mary the chief delights are due to the life-giving merits of the Saviour. As a Fountain of Life, He pours out all manner of gifts and graces into the virginal bosom of His Mother.

This truth is of the greatest honor to the Blessed Mother and to her Divine Son. It may be illustrated for us by the interchange of gifts between the Queen of Saba and King Solomon. The Queen brought him gifts, the like of which were never brought before or after to Jerusalem. But she received in return from Solomon such gifts as were never seen there again. *There were not such precious perfumes as those which the Queen of Saba gave to Solomon the King. But Solomon the King gave to the Queen of Saba much more than she had brought to him.*[9] Thus we have to consider what the Virgin Mary has given

[9] II. Paralipomena, ix.

to Christ in order to understand what Christ gives to the Blessed Virgin in return.

In the first place, that which the commonest of mothers gives to her offspring is so great a gift that it can never have sufficient recompense. This is what St. Thomas quotes from Aristotle: "We can never give due thanks to the gods and to our parents."

Yet this gift is the least claim to gratitude which the Blessed Virgin has on our Lord Jesus Christ. She has given Him an infinitely higher good than any other mother can give her child, and she has given it with love incomprehensible to us. Thus she surpasses all possible mothers in the substance of the gift and in the manner of its giving. And thus Jesus Christ is under greater obligations to her than any other child can possibly be to his mother.

The Virgin Mary did not merely give life to her Son. She gave Him such life that its least moment was worth more than the lives of all creatures. The giving of it also, as St. Anselm remarks, was not shared in by a father and a mother, as is the case with other children; but the life of Christ was the gift of Mary alone.

Thus she concurred—as the second and created cause—in the production of the Humanity of Jesus Christ. In their speculations on this mystery, great masters of theology have thought that she also concurred—as the instrumental cause—in producing that wondrous union by which the Humanity and the

Eternal Word of God are joined together in one [as the Incarnate God]. Thus she would merit the title bestowed on her by Hesychius—"Instrument of the Incarnation of God."

Who can rightly appreciate what the Virgin Mary has thus given to the Redeemer, being the source of His created being as true Man and the instrument of its Hypostatic Union with His Uncreated Being as true God?

Gifts are, as it were, only the body of a benefit, while love is its very soul. And from this, too, the manner of her gift increases the beneficence of Mary to her Divine Son. Its affection surpasses the understanding even of the Angels in Paradise.

The holy mother of the Macchabees said to her sons: *I know not how you appeared in my womb.*[10] The same may be said to their offspring by all other mothers; for they give life, as it were, blindly to those they know not and love not. It was not so with the Blessed Virgin. She consented that this Son Jesus should enter her chaste womb, and she excluded from it every other birth. Hence she not only loved Christ because she had brought Him forth, but she generated Him because of her intense love for Him.

Her charity even hastened His life, for she hurried on the Incarnation with her merits and sighs and pleadings. This the Angel had already declared

[10] II. Macchabees, vii. 22.

to the Prophet Daniel: *The seventy weeks are shortened upon thy people.*[11]

St. Gregory of Nazianzen points out that "the grace of a favor given is doubled by its being prompt and speedy." The good of Christ's life was infinite in itself. How great was not the well-doing to Him of each moment that Mary the Virgin hastened His coming! How blessed were her prayers and merits that drew Him from the Bosom of the Father down to her virginal womb!

This is the sum of the gifts which this Queen of all creatures gave to her Divine King. From this we may judge the exceeding sum of the gifts which He gave her in return.

This Son of hers, on the one side, is so rich that all the treasures of the Eternal Father are in His hands; and, on the other, He owes immeasurably more to His Mother than all men together can ever owe to merely created benefactors. What shall He give in satisfaction of all that He owes her? In Him the virtue of His gratitude cannot be less than His liberality. Therefore as many as are the gifts which His liberality has poured forth on all created beings, so many will be the gifts which His gratitude will bestow upon His Virgin Mother alone.

She, as the created cause of His Human Being, has placed Him under the greatest of all possible obligations—that for the gift of life. He cannot but respond with the highest of all possible gifts which a

[11] Daniel, ix. 24.

pure creature can receive according to the established laws of His grace. This is why St. Bonaventure lays down this proposition: "The Blessed Virgin had as great grace as a pure creature was able to receive."

This is still truer from the fact that with her alone Jesus Christ could exercise the fair virtue of gratitude. And He exercised it as a God; that is, more abundingly than the Ocean which should bestow its waters on a single river. *Solomon the King hath given to the Queen of Saba much more than she hath brought to Him.*

Rightly then does St. Peter Damian name the Heart of Mary Christ's garden of delights. Elsewhere He could find only thorns: *I am in labors from my youth.* But in the Virgin's breast He found a resting-place. Unlike other children, He is brought forth from this abode, as it were, perforce. *It is Thou Who hast drawn Me forth from My mother's womb*—from that dwelling of His delights. And His Blessed Mother—we need not wonder at it—was ever sweetly calling Him back to His rest within her Heart. *May My Beloved come into His garden.*[12]

O Advocate of all mankind—Mother of Pity—Refuge of sinners—the first of the redeemed and the first of the disciples of Jesus Christ, the faithful companion of all His toils and, by thy virtues, the living

[12] Psalms, lxvii. 16, xxi. 10; Canticles, v. 1.

image of His Sacred Heart—thou alone, amongst all creatures, hast given to the Creator that created being which He had not, whereby God has been made Man; and in thy Immaculate Heart thou hast prepared a Paradise of delights wherein the Eternal Word has descended from the Bosom of the Father. Thy Heart is like unto His Divine Heart, Whose happiness it is to bless and save the children of men. Therefore, with St. Bernard, we cry to thee:

"Remember, Mary, tenderest-hearted Virgin, how from of old the ear hath never heard that he who ran to thee for refuge, implored thy help, and sought thy prayers, was forsaken of God. Virgin of virgins, Mother, emboldened by this confidence I fly to thee, to thee I come, and in thy presence I, a weeping sinner, stand. Mother of the Word Incarnate, oh cast not away my prayers, but in thy pity hear and answer!"

APPENDIX.

DOCTRINAL AUTHORITIES QUOTED BY THE AUTHOR.

ALL Christian teaching is concerned with Jesus Christ. This is the mystery of mysteries—the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity—that *the Word was made Flesh, and dwelt amongst us.* In this mystery, where God becomes Man, the Blessed Virgin Mary has an essential part as the one chosen from all others to be the Mother of God Incarnate. This is our elementary faith according to the Apostle's Creed where, immediately after confessing God the Father and Creator, profession of belief is made—"in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord, Who was CONCEIVED BY THE HOLY GHOST, BORN OF THE VIRGIN MARY." St. Paul insists on this in connection with the Redemption whereby, as St. John declares—*To as many as receive Him, He hath given the power to become the children of God.*

When the fulness of time had come God sent HIS SON, MADE OF A WOMAN, *made under the law,*

That He might redeem those who were under the law, SO THAT WE MIGHT RECEIVE THE ADOPTION OF SONS.[1]

Devotion to the Blessed Virgin is thus an essential part of the Christian's love of her Divine Son; and the considerations of this book are designed to unfold this side of the mystery of the Incarnation. St. Bernardine of Sienna, so often cited by the author and known in the Church as the Apostle of the Name of Jesus, sums up their meaning in these words: "That a Woman should conceive and bring forth God, is the miracle of miracles!"

As the object of the present work is purely devotional, it did not come within the author's scope to cite those formal definitions of Popes and Councils which give to the faithful

[1] St. John, i. 12, 14; Galatians, iv. 4, 5.

sons of the Church the doctrinal basis of their devotion. On the other hand, he has made an extensive use of the sources from which the Church, guided by the Holy Ghost, derives her doctrine. It has been thought best to classify these for the benefit of those readers who may desire to see at one glance how far the pious thoughts of the author belong to all the true disciples of Christ in all ages, and are directly due to the inspiration of the Holy Ghost.

1.—Summary of Texts of Scripture.

(*a*) The *Protevangelion*, or primitive revelation of the Redemption, made immediately after the Fall, *Genesis*, *iii.* 15; this refers to the Mother of the Redeemer (she is further described as the *Virgin* Mother of the *Emmanuel*, i. e. God with us, by the Prophet Isaias, vii. 14). This founds the comparison of Mary—the second Eve, Mother of the living—with the first Eve, mother of the dead, according to St. Paul's comparison of our Lord with Adam, I. *Corinthians*, *xv.* 22.

(*b*) Descriptions of the *Divine Wisdom*, directly referring to the Eternal Word, but applied to the Mother of the Word Incarnate: especially *Proverbs*, *viii.*; *Wisdom*, *vii.*; *Ecclesiasticus*, *xxiv.* The dogmatic Bull *Ineffabilis*, in which Pius IX. defined the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, says of these passages: "Those very words with which the Holy Scriptures speak of Uncreated Wisdom and declare Its origin in eternity, the Church is accustomed to use in her ecclesiastical offices and in the sacred liturgy, transferring them to the Virgin whose creation was determined *by one and the same decree* with the Incarnation of Divine Wisdom."

(*c*) Passages referring to the soul and Christ as its *Beloved*, applied by way of eminence to the most holy soul of Mary: thus, the entire book of *Canticles*; *Psalm xliv.*; and elsewhere.

(*d*) Symbolic texts, such as the comparison of *Sun and*

Moon with Christ and His Mother, in their respective offices in the Church: *Genesis, i.* 16; *Isaias, xxx.* 26; *Canticles, vi.* 9; *Joel, ii.* 31. Also, the Blessed Virgin as the *City of God, Psalms xlv., lxxxvi.; Canticles, vi.* 3; *Lamentations, i.* 12.

(*e*) Texts directly referring to the Virgin Mary in the *Gospels*, especially of *St. Luke* (See Northcote's *Mary in the Gospels*).

2.—*List of Fathers, Doctors, and Ecclesiastical Writers.*

A. Greek and Oriental.

St. Irenæus, disciple of the disciples of St. John the Evangelist.

St. Dionysius the Areopagite.
St. Ignatius, martyr.
St. Epiphanius.
St. Basil the Great, Constantinople.
St. John Chrysostom.
St. Ephrem, Syrian.
Theodoret.
St. Basil of Seleucia.
St. John Damascene.
St. Sophronius, Jerusalem.
St. Methodius, Apostle of the Slavonic race.
St. Andrew of Crete.
Anastasius, Monk of Mount Sinai.
St. Eusebius of Emesa.
Hesychius.

B. Latin and Mediæval.

Tertullian.
St. Ambrose.
St. Augustine.
St. Jerome.
St. Fulgentius.

St. Gregory the Great.
St. Ildephonsus.
St. Eucherius.
St. Hildebert.
St. Peter Chrysologus.
St. Peter Damian.
St. Anselm.
St. Bernard.
Guerricus.
Abbot William.
Albertus Magnus.
St. Thomas Aquinas.
St. Bonaventure.
Chancellor Gerson, University of Paris.
Hugh and Richard of St. Victor.
Richard of St. Laurence.
Cardinal Cusa.
Arnold Carnotensis.
St. Bernardine of Sienna.
St. Thomas of Villanova.

For a convenient summary of the witness of the early Church to the devotion to the Blessed Virgin, see Cardinal Newman's remarkable *Letter to Dr. Pusey.*

C. Private revelations made to the Saints.

These are sparingly used in the present work, and they have no *public* authority from the Church. Their credit rests on a twofold base: first, that our Lord, according to His good pleasure, concedes the gift of *prophecy* to certain chosen souls for the benefit of the Christian people (I. *Corinthians, xiv.* 22); and secondly, that the Church by recognizing the sanctity of certain of these seers guarantees their sincerity and good faith.

St. Gertrude and St. Mechtilde.
St. Bridget of Sweden.
Blessed Amedeus of Savoy.

St. Catharine of Sienna.
St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi.
St. Teresa.

D. Later theologians.

Suarez, on the *Incarnation:* This great work contained what was perhaps the first, and is still the completest, exposition of *Marian* theology. It is chiefly relied on by the author. He makes frequent references also to Salazar. The quotations are largely made on the faith of the *Palaestra* of Vega. Use has also been made of the labors of Blessed Peter Canisius, the apostle of Germany after the so-called Reformation.

As these doctrinal authorities are used in the present work for purposes of edification alone, they are far from fully representing the central position of the Blessed Virgin in Christian literature from the Apostles down to our own day. To the thoughtful reader, however, they will confirm what is of proverbial truth among Catholics and is declared by the Holy Ghost concerning the Wise Men's search for the Christ: [2] THEY FOUND THE CHILD WITH MARY HIS MOTHER, *and falling down they adored Him.*

[2] St. Matthew, ii. 11.

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